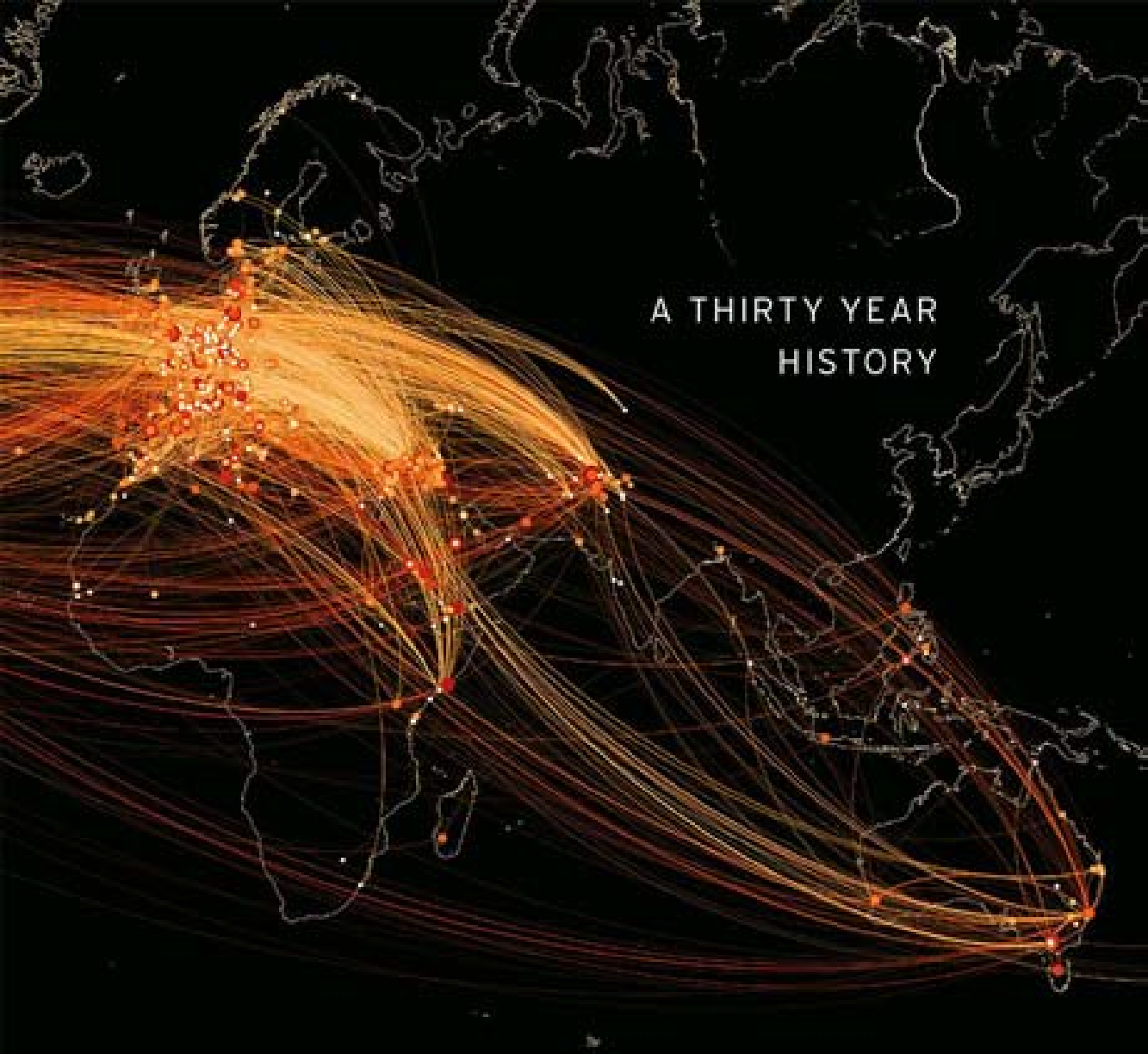

A THIRTY YEAR HISTORY

Western Jihadism

JYTTE KLAUSEN

WESTERN JIHADISM

In the teeming field of Al Qaeda studies Jytte Klausen's book is a real gem; a full history of AQ that really explains why it has, and will continue to have, such staying power.

Its analysis is based on a 15-year terrorism data programme that is simply the best I have seen. Though it may be uncomfortable reading for those who prefer to believe that western society itself creates Al Qaeda terrorism, Klausen's conclusions are impossible to dodge.

Michael Clarke, Professor of Defence Studies,
University of Exeter, and Chairman,
Countering Jihadism in the UK, 2016-20

Western Jihadism: A Thirty-Year History is a substantial contribution to the field and to an understanding of the depth of the terrorist networks and their linkages within the networks that remain a global threat today. Professor Klausen's immense data collection and analysis will provide a basis for the study of Western Jihadism for decades to come.

Gale A Mattox, Professor of Political Science,
U.S. Naval Academy

Klausen's Western Jihadism: A Thirty-Year History not only helps connect the dots that were missed about al-Qaeda's network leading up to the 9/11 attacks, but also then helps piece together the networks that re-emerged and were created in the attack's aftermath. Backed by an unprecedented database of all Western residents and citizens involved in the jihadi movement, Klausen clarifies many misconceptions and misunderstandings about al-Qaeda's and later the Islamic State's networks in the West and how they have evolved over the past thirty years. It will no doubt become an important resource for academics, practitioners, and policy-makers alike when trying to understand the phenomenon of jihadism in the West.

Aaron Zelin, author of Your Sons Are At Your Service:
Tunisia's Missionaries of Jihad

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JYTTE KLAUSEN

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
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First Edition published in 2021
Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020947222

ISBN 978–0–19–887079–1

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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This book is dedicated to the teams of Brandeis University students who have worked on this project with skill, commitment, and dedication.

Preface

Fifteen years ago, in a book also published by Oxford University Press, I challenged the *Clash of Civilizations* thesis promoted by Samuel P. Huntington, a Harvard professor, who argued that Muslims in the West are an "indigestible minority," made incapable of integrating into a liberal democracy by their observance of religious law that precludes loyalty to a secular constitution. My research had demonstrated that, in fact, European Muslim civic leaders and elected politicians unequivocally supported the norms of democratic governance.

A few reviewers complained that I had ignored the obvious. Self-evidently, Islamists had declared war on the West in the name of Islam. Why did I write only about the "good" Muslims? Oddly, around the same time that the "culture war" over Islam in the West was building, government officials across Europe and in the United States were not particularly troubled by Islamist extremism. It did not represent an obvious, immediate challenge to domestic security. Osama Bin Laden was in hiding. There had been no serious terrorist acts in the West since the suicide bombings of the London Underground in 2005. Al Qaeda seemed beaten.

I thought both camps had it wrong. The resurgence of this violent apocalyptic fringe movement has little to do with religion or how Muslims living in Western democracies feel or think about their lives. Western Muslims are not generally alienated from the broader society. Al Qaeda would never recruit more than a tiny minority of Western citizens to its service. However, the global jihadist movement that Osama Bin Laden spearheaded continues to pose a danger to the domestic security of Western democracies and to the political and economic stability of countries with large Muslim populations in Africa and Asia.

The problem was that we just did not have good data for understanding the mechanics of how a global transnational terrorist organization was able to mobilize and grow on the scale that Al Qaeda and its affiliates have been able to do. Therefore, in 2006, working with my students, I began to collect

the data needed to get to an evidence-based understanding of how Al Qaeda took hold in Western democracies. This book describes the results of my data gathering project and presents a novel picture of how Western jihadism developed. Riding a wave of globalization and mass migration, it was at once global and local, religious and political, fundamentalist in ideology, post-modern in its practice. And it is still there, stronger than ever.

Acknowledgments

This book has been a decade in the writing. The Western Jihadism Project, the online archive from which all the data used in this book derives, took even longer to build. Many students, colleagues and collaborators helped me to set up and maintain the data archive, and to prepare the book for publication. Over the years, generations of Brandeis University students have worked with me on research that in one way or another is the foundation for this book. This book is dedicated to them.

My deep thanks go to Rosanne Libretti, a dedicated collaborator and a skilled and tireless research assistant, who is responsible for the graphic of the global organization of Western jihadism that graces the cover of this book. Two of my students, Joseph Coles and Nick Yanco, helped push me over the goal line by mastering the reference management software used here to keep track of the many references and generate the bibliography. Special thanks are due to Annalyn Bachmann, Alexandra Johnson, Priyanka R. Renugopalakrishnan, Eliane Tschaen Barbieri, and Aaron Y. Zelin, who became collaborators and co-authors. Haliana Burhans, Selene Campion, Sam Chestna, Katherine Dowling, Zachary Herman, Daniel Mangoubi, Evan Maloney, and Yujiao Su began as student assistants and stayed on to work on the research for years, sometimes returning after graduation to do more work. Rima Farah helped with the translation of Bin Laden's personal journal from his difficult handwriting in Arabic. Siyi Cao, Alyssa Goncalves, Michael Nagler and Siting Ren built the online infrastructure for the data collection in a relational database management system that made it doable to coordinate qualitative and quantitative data.

Some years ago, Benjamin Hung got in touch with me to ask for permission to use some of my data. This became the beginning of a fruitful and intellectually challenging collaboration that features in Chapter 9 of this book. Benjamin and his colleagues in computer science at Colorado State University, Anura Jayasumana and Shashika Muramudalige have been steadfast research collaborators throughout the perilous pandemic.

I was fortunate to have Bruce Hoffman as an interlocutor, even though we have rarely been in the same place at the same time. Bruce gave me the opportunity to present the last chapter of this book at a Council on Foreign Relations Roundtable webinar, which helped me articulate my ideas more clearly.

Special thanks are due to my dean, Dorothy Hodgson, who granted me a semester off from teaching to work on the manuscript. The Theodore and Jane Norman Awards for Faculty Scholarship at Brandeis supported my research throughout the project. Steve Burg, my chair for years, now retired, made funding for student research assistants available through the Research Circle on Democracy and Pluralism. Ed Hackett, vice provost for research, provided start-up finance to transform my data archive to an online platform using relational database management principles. Mitch Cherniack, my colleague in computer science, helped me make that transition. Ian Roy helped me make the transition to online database management and archiving.

The Smith Richardson Foundation gave generous support for the writing of the book (Award #2012-9015). A fellowship from The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars provided me with a stimulating base while I was writing the initial draft of the manuscript. Robert S. Litwak and my colleagues at the Center are thanked for their insights and support.

The data collection informing this book was supported by an award from the National Science Foundation's Rapid Response Grants (Award #1649068); the U.S. Army Research Office (Award # 66652LS.); and The Minerva Initiative, U.S. Department of Defense (W911NF-15-1-0097).

I am grateful to Dominic Byatt and Oxford University Press for, once again, publishing my book. Olivia Wells managed the production of the manuscript in simultaneous print and electronic versions.

My children, Rebekka, Jan, and Andreas, and my partner, Adam Kuper, are thanked for their forbearance and for their trust in my ability to complete the arduous task I had taken on.

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1

Introduction

Al Qaeda, the world's most dangerous terrorist organization, was founded in August 1988 at a meeting that Osama Bin Laden convened in his house in Peshawar, Pakistan. (Al Qaeda did not start in Saudi Arabia, as is often thought.) He wanted to create a rapid deployment force of experienced fighters for the armed *jihad*, to be commanded by himself and a small cadre of veteran jihadist revolutionaries. The movement that Bin Laden initiated in his sitting room, in exile, ballooned into a global movement of political cadres, public intellectuals and street preachers, military fighter brigades, and webmasters waging online *jihad*. Decades later, the movement that Bin Laden started is operating on five continents and includes an estimated 100,000 armed fighters in Asia and Africa. The number is based on reporting by the analytical support team of the United Nations Security Council's ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee, and analyses by independent researchers. A report from 2018 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimated the number of active Al Qaeda-aligned fighters to be closer to 250,000, 270% higher than in 2001 at the time of the 9/11 attacks.[1] No one really knows precisely how many there are.

This book is about the Western branch organizations in this global movement. Western democracies have been the target and, paradoxically, home base—sometimes, a sanctuary—for the global jihadist movement. Jihadism is fueled by a revulsion against the values and objectives that sustain global growth and openness. Nevertheless, the movement thrives on globalization. Nationalists mourn the erosion of borders caused by globalization. The jihadists see it as an opportunity. They fight not for control of a patch of land. They fight against the system of states.

Al Qaeda and the jihadist movement, broadly defined as the networks and organizations, supporters and propagandists aligned with Al Qaeda or

the Islamic State, is not, of course, only, or even primarily, a Western phenomenon.[2] In the 1990s, Osama Bin Laden developed the doctrine of attacking the "far enemy," the United States and its Western allies, on the assumption that relentless terrorism against American and Western targets would compel the United States to withdraw support from governments in the Muslim world. The strategy anticipates that in consequence, "the near enemy," the political classes in Muslim majority countries, will be left vulnerable to the religious revolution that the jihadists see as the first step to the creation of a universal reign under God's law. It is a fantastical belief system. However, it is no more fantastical than revolutionary Marxism, which envisioned a stateless world to be brought into being by the awakening of the global proletariat, and which attracted followers across the world for 150 years. That people hold to fanatical ideologies is not what needs to be explained. The puzzle is how a belief system that kills off its followers at a high rate and is violently inimical not just to Western democracy but to all existing forms of Muslim governments can attract followers among Western Muslims and converts to Islam.

The argument of this book is that the diffusion of jihadist extremism in Western democracies was driven by the strategic objectives of Osama Bin Laden and the global movement he spearheaded rather than, as is often argued, by local grievances of Western Muslims. I use the word "movement" to describe the global jihadist organization, but it is in fact more than a social movement. Social movements are usually are seen as leaderless "fuzzy" communities held together by shared ideas. The global jihadist movement is also held together by ideas, but the global organization has hierarchies and authority structures that create a hard core of control-and-command. It is these clandestine command structures that make it possible for the global movement to engage in coordinated insurgencies and manage terrorist campaigns across continents, and to do so in the pursuit of a unified strategic project.

An apt term for this sort of very contemporary local-global phenomenon is "glocal," which the sociologist Anthony Giddens once defined as: "Intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa."[3] More prosaically, "glocalization" also refers to the adaptation of international products to the local context in which they are sold. Two observations may be made. The first is that glocalization creates infrastructures for risk management and risk avoidance, and for the

allocation of resources, labor, and revenues. The transnational jihadist networks manage all that very efficiently. The other observation is that power in the glocal corporation rests not with the local hubs but with the global management.

Bin Laden, a Saudi millionaire, began his revolutionary career in alliance with Egyptian and Arab Islamist militants. In founding Al Qaeda, his intention was to create a vanguard organization that would topple apostate Muslim regimes. But while the jihadists are utopians, they are also very practical revolutionaries. The extremist networks thrive on the transformations associated with globalization—increased openness of societies, cheap travel, and the ease with which ideas and influences can be disseminated from one region of the globe to another. Western societies provided them with opportunities to broadcast their views, to recruit supporters, to organize, and to move people and money around the world. Without this Western infrastructure, Bin Laden's project would have fallen apart at an early stage. The jihadist movement is globalist in aspiration and transnational in practice.

In the 1990s, Western hubs of displaced North African and Middle Eastern extremist Islamists became absorbed into the global jihadist movement. Al Qaeda established bases in North America, Europe, and Australia. Over time, as they adapted to local conditions, these Western hubs and networks developed their own styles and vernaculars. But, always, their primary purpose was to recruit for the global movement. Western militants are fitted into the global organization. What they do and how they do it is determined by the bosses' business plan. Growth came at the cost of a certain loss of control, a familiar problem for any business. Bin Laden's project is, nevertheless, on its own terms, a success story.

The data used here come from the Western Jihadism Project, a research program I started in 2006 and have continued without interruption since then. The project identified Western residents and citizens who have committed terrorism-related crimes or who died while engaged in an attack or while fighting in an insurgency in the name of Al Qaeda or any of the many groups and organization aligned with Al Qaeda and committed to the global armed *jihad*.

The database includes demographic and biographical information about the thousands of men—5,832 to be precise, and 561 women—who meet the inclusion criteria. We record their contacts with other identified terrorists, and document conspiracies committed by the networks. Twenty countries

are represented in the database. The methods used for collecting the data are described in the Appendix.

The network map on the cover of this book depicts thirty years of networking by Western jihadists and their bosses in the global jihadist movement. The network lines resemble familiar maps stashed in the pockets of seats on board planes showing the airline's route net traversing the earth. Here, they represent communications between Western militants and their opposite numbers in the network. The map shows the travel from their hometowns in the pursuit of terrorism-related activities, and it charts their communications with other actors in terrorist networks. Each dot and line reflects a data point derived from public information gathered by my teams of student researchers and manually entered into a digitally-managed database. It took fifteen years and the work of eighty students.

Analytically, the militants and their organizations are treated as a connecting point in the network (*nodes*). The dots pinned on the map mark the militants' residencies and the geographical locations in which they engaged in terrorist activities or the location of their contacts. Each line (*edge*) between the nodes in the network represents communications for purposes of conspiracy, acts of terrorism, and other actions or communications associated with terrorism-related crimes revealed in public records.

A total of 44,500 edges representing links between the actors and entities were used in the generation of the network graphic. The cover graphic vividly illustrates how Western-based militants integrated with the global jihadist movement, and connected with its training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and with jihadist insurgencies from Somalia to Syria.

The dense mass of connected dots linking the nodes in North America, Western Europe and Australia provides a summary visual representation of the transnational social organization of Western jihadism uncovered by the research project. The map shows how widely dispersed the cells, organizations, and individuals are across the Western world from Alaska and the U.S. West Coast to Asia and on to Australia, and how closely they are interrelated. It may be assumed that the map captures just the visible tip of the metaphorical iceberg. Those depicted here are only the publicly-known networked communications that we have been able to document from the public records available to us through court documents and media reports. Whatever lies below, we do not and cannot know.

Al Qaeda in the 1990s was like a start-up. It failed and then failed again. But it had a formula for starting up once more. Operating both in jihadist

heartlands and in the West, the movement has spread through a process that I will describe as networked contagion. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a cadre of North African and Arab Islamist militants escaped to Europe and North America following failed attempts at revolution at home. From their bases in New York, London, Milan, Madrid, and a handful of other cities, they helped Osama Bin Laden staff Al Qaeda and provided logistical support and manpower so that Bin Laden could strike at the West. The bold attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, was a crowning achievement for Bin Laden's organization.

Bin Laden was not a theorist of revolution, or a religious scholar. He was a political entrepreneur. His singular accomplishment was to give extremist Islamism a new strategic direction by focusing on a war against the "far enemy," the United States and its Western allies. Global terrorism was the tactic, but for that he needed Western adherents who could man clandestine transnational networks and use their passports to travel far and wide. His special talent was the ability to translate theory into action. He saw early on that new communications technologies made it possible for his organization to coordinate globally and exploit gaps in surveillance.

For many years, few people in the West understood the true nature of the extremist Islamist ideology that motivated many jihadist refugees. In any case, it was assumed that they would do as most exiled expatriates do—blend in, be grateful for having been granted refuge, and direct their anger against their home countries.

There were well-trodden pathways of migration from former colonies to the metropolitan centers of the former colonial powers and to New York City, a favorite destination for generations of migrants. Generous rules for granting residency to political refugees and persecuted religious groups from the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries had been passed in the 1980s. These opened the doors also to religious dissidents from authoritarian Muslim countries.

The first generation of jihadist refugees included some men who became leading figures in the *jihad* against the West. Omar Abdel-Rahman, an Egyptian cleric, known as the "Blind Sheikh," led the cell responsible for the 1993 World Trade Center from a perch in Brooklyn. Abu Qatada al-Filistini (meaning "the Palestinian"), whose real name is Omar Mahmoud Mohammad, lived in London for two decades, where he built up a formidable local network and was a nuisance to British authorities until he was deported to Jordan in 2013. Abu Dahdah (alias Emad Eddin Barakat Yarkas)

a Syrian-born militant, ran an Al Qaeda cell in Spain and provided logistical support for the 9/11 hijackers. All were beneficiaries of new rules for granting residency to political refugees and persecuted religious groups. Using their new passports, the militants plotted and organized, and they created a cosmopolitan and global network.

The jihadists thrived on the opening of borders that followed the end of the Cold War. Operatives who had fled or been expelled from their home countries were free to live the lives of post-national cosmopolitans, and to build transnational networks. But the encounter with the West challenged their norms and values, and led them to adopt new ways of doing *jihad*.

At first, they operated mainly in mosques and prayer rooms. But their message soon spread more widely when the propagandists spoke the local languages: French, German, and always, English, which is the common language among polyglot youths. A cadre of extremist public intellectuals articulated the doctrines to fit the needs of the new audiences. They uploaded long sermons on the internet, sold compact discs online, and marketed their tracts in bookstores. Gradually the preaching incorporated local grievances. As they established a presence online, they reached audiences that were not confined to meeting halls and prayer rooms.

None of this was criminal at the time, and many aspects of these activities are still not criminalized because they are, in essence, the sort of things that many legitimate political and religious groups do: hold meetings, spread the word, and proselytize. Jihadist intellectuals modified their ideas in this encounter with the West. Adapting and rejecting Western political ideas and styles of protest, they developed a remarkably consistent anti-liberal system of thought and populist rhetorical styles that appealed to new followers with little or no knowledge of Islam.

The first time the Western bases rescued Bin Laden's project was after he was thrown out of Sudan, in 1996. The men who came to his rescue were expatriate militants who had fled the home countries in North Africa and the Middle East in the 1980s and 1990s and who, over a few years, became integrated into networks under Bin Laden's command.

The second time the Western militants rescued Bin Laden's project came after Al Qaeda's near-death experience in December 2001, following the American counterstrike in response to the September 11 attacks. Al Qaeda's bases in Afghanistan were obliterated, the leadership cadre decimated or driven into exile. The internet, another Western invention, helped the

movement grow back, changing the ways in which the terrorist networks organize their operations and recruit new followers. This time, the rescue took the form of what became known as "homegrown" terrorism.

Some analysts interpreted the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 that swept Arab countries with a demand for reform and democracy as a repudiation of Al Qaeda's agenda. Fawaz Gerges, a professor at the London School of Economics, wrote that, "Only a miracle will resuscitate a transnational jihad of the al-Qaeda variety [...] the Arab Spring represents a fundamental challenge to the very conditions that fuel extremist ideologies."[4] In 2012, Peter Bergen, the author of several books on Bin Laden and a commentator on CNN, declared that Al Qaeda had been "defeated" because of the Arab Spring. He compared Al Qaeda to Blockbuster, a video rental chain that went bust when movie watching went online.[5]

Skeptics countered that the pro-reform Arab Spring movement was fractured, and that in many places it was coming under the control of the better organized Islamist groups. Two veteran Al Qaeda observers, Bruce Hoffman and Rohan Gunaratna, were among the skeptics.[6] Acknowledging that the first generation of Al Qaeda, the so-called "Core," may be in decline, Al Qaeda has succeeded in expanding its tentacles. Al Qaeda's tactic, Gunaratna wrote, was to go along with the democratic movements in the short term and win over new recruits. They would then try to take over the local resistance. This was what happened. When the regimes collapsed in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen, the extremists found room to recruit new followers. In Syria and Iraq, civil wars opened doors for a jihadist revival.

Democracy, it turned out, was not the antidote to extremism that it was supposed to be. Tunisia is an example of a successful transition from an authoritarian regime to a representative democratic republic after the 2011 Arab Spring revolution. But as Aaron Zelin writes, Tunisians joined the Islamic State in unprecedented numbers and became one of its largest sources of foreign fighters.[7]

By 2012, Syria had become a destination for old and new militants committed to the jihadist program. The proximity to Europe made this war zone particularly attractive to a new generation of righteous fighters for the cause—and their would-be wives. The movement's European bases sprang into action again, recruiting and organizing volunteers to fight with Al Qaeda. Some militants opted rather for Al Qaeda's deviant offspring, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (referred to as Da'esh, ISIL or ISIS).

ISIS renamed itself to the Islamic State, resulting in a profoundly confusing alphabet soup of acronyms. To be clear, "the Islamic State" is a terrorist organization and also refers to a pseudo-state that lasted for more or less five years. That state, in turn, was the base for the proclamation of a new "caliphate," a fictional claim conjured up by the terrorist group to control all of the world's Muslims. (Media organizations use ISIS/ISIL, and the Islamic State alternatingly to refer to the terrorist group. Many have stuck with ISIS as the label even after the group changed its name. Here, ISIS is used when referring to the group and "Islamic State" when referring to the territory it occupied.)

At its peak, the Islamic State controlled about ten million people across northern Iraq and eastern Syria comprising a territory the size of the United Kingdom.

The Islamic State was the product of an invading army of crowd-sourced foreign volunteers. In 2017, Army Lt. Gen. Michael K. Nagata, the director of the National Counterterrorism Center's Directorate for Strategic Operational Planning, assessed that an estimate of 40,000 foreign terrorist fighters from at least 120 countries had been identified, at that time, as having joined the Islamic State. Nagata admitted the number was imprecise, and added, "It is probably the most ethnically diverse, sociologically diverse, non-monolithic [...] foreign fighter problem we have seen, so far." It was also "inarguably the largest foreign fighter challenge the world has seen in the modern age."[8]

Explaining jihadist terrorism in the West

Why do they do it? There is a large, sprawling literature on the root causes of terrorism and on Al Qaeda specifically. Academic specialists in security studies and terrorism studies (which are not the same fields) have, however, been curiously blind to the ways in which globalization made it possible for an effective non-state networked global organization to emerge, grow, and manage its operations. These global terrorist networks work differently from states, but may occupy the same stage. Security studies have focused on states as the effective actors in international relations, and downplayed the independent importance of international terrorist networks. In their view, terrorism only becomes significant when it finds a state sponsor.

Martha Crenshaw perceptively pointed out in her book *Explaining Terrorism* (2011) that international relations theorists have an ingrained

state-centric bias.[9] The bias has made international relations specialists dismiss the national security risk that a non-state actor may pose to domestic security as well as to global stability. It followed from the state-centric theories that terrorists will not be able to undermine a Western state, nor bring about a shift in the balance of power in the global system.

Sociologically-inspired approaches have their own blind spots. Rather than identifying state sponsors, terrorism studies specialized in bottom-up analyses of the root causes of terrorism and motivations—of which there are so many that they cannot easily be generalized. However, they tend to ignore the broader strategic thinking of a sophisticated global leadership.

Law enforcement and intelligence agencies too have had trouble connecting the dots. The *9/11 Commission Report* found that the information needed to anticipate and assess the threat posed by Bin Laden had been flagged and routinely put on the desks of successive presidents. The institutions responsible for the country's safety nevertheless failed to prevent the attacks because of "four kinds of failures: in imagination, policy, capabilities, and management."[10] The world of academia may also be faulted for a lack of imagination, and for a failure to recognize the big picture.

Broadly, three schools of thought—three-and-a-half schools, if we include the argument that Islam itself is the root cause of the problem with Islamist extremism—have dominated the discussion of why Al Qaeda decided to attack the "far enemy," the United States and its Western allies. I will discuss them briefly in turn and then sketch an alternative perspective.

The first line of argument is what Max Abrahms calls the Strategic Model of Terrorism, which is associated with what is known as the Realist school in international relations theory. This school of thought is particularly influential in security studies in American universities and in the foreign policy establishment. Realist theory takes it for granted, first, that states are the central actors in international politics and, second, that what states do is motivated by national interests. Expressions of moral concern or ideology are simply cloaks for self-interest.[11] States may be resource rich or resource poor, but all compete for influence and control. Terrorism is accordingly understood as a tactic, used in the competition between states, to gain control of territory, of people, and of governance.

In his book *Dying to Win* (2005) Robert A. Pape argued that terrorism works. The title says it all. Suicide terrorists are a substitute for smart bombs. Strap a vest on somebody and point him or her in the right direction, the human wrapped in the bomb will get to the target. Terrorism is selected

when it is the most efficient means to achieve an objective, and so is suicide terrorism. As for the suicide terrorist's own motivations, they are incidental to the strategic interests of the terrorist organization. There is nothing particularly religious about jihadist suicide terrorism. Many terrorist groups aside from Al Qaeda have used suicide missions, among them groups that have no sympathy for Islamist conceptions of martyrdom. The Realists can cite historical examples in support of their thesis. National liberation movements from the African National Congress to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Basque and Northern Irish separatists used terrorism to ratchet up costs to the state but were pacified by concessions and compromises.

Al Qaeda's campaign against the West, Pape writes, "is mainly a response to foreign occupation rather than the product of Islamic fundamentalism."[12] He insists it is wrong to assume that jihadist suicide terrorism is the product of an evil ideology. The ideology may be evil, but an evil ideology is not the cause of what the terrorists do. The jihadist terrorist campaign will continue as long as the United States has troops in Iraq and on the Arabian Peninsula. This makes the United States an occupying force and therefore the target. Withdraw, let the locals handle the problem, Pape advised, and the attacks on the United States and the West will cease.

Max Abrahms, also coming from the Realist school, argues that, on the contrary, terrorism does *not* work. It repels the people whose support the terrorists seek. And the more violent terrorists become, the less inclined governments will be to negotiate with them.[13] The 9/11 attacks are an example. They hurt rather than helped Al Qaeda. After the 9/11 attacks, Al Qaeda's organization was decimated, and its leadership forced into exile. The strike was a disaster for the movement. According to Abrahms, the Islamic State imploded from within because its "caliphate" depended on a reign of terror and therefore was not sustainable.

So, what should Western governments do? Ignore the terrorists, Abrahms counsels. Don't talk them up. Don't kill the leaders. That will only rouse the followers. Governments should engage with the terrorist leaders, but in private. Smart leaders will control their followers and limit the violence. Bad leaders will ratchet up the violence and so lose support. When militant leaders are stupid enough to broadcast their massacres, let's not stand in their way. The more violent, the less likely the group is to succeed.

Abrahms' final piece of advice is that governments should put his book "into the hands of militant leaders. Following his rules will help them

achieve their goals."[14] Bin Laden had a surprisingly large collection of books written by American analysts and academics in his house in Abbottabad, Pakistan. He might have been interested. But would ignoring Al Qaeda persuade Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian physician and militant who became the leader of Al Qaeda after Bin Laden's death in 2011, to negotiate? There is no plausible scenario under which that is a likely outcome.

In twenty years, Al Qaeda has not been able to stage another coup on the scale of the 9/11 attacks. International terrorism could be ignored as a risk to American domestic security—which among some of the more isolationists thinkers in international relations is all that matters—unless they have "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD) capable of causing mass civilian casualties. And it is unlikely that terrorist groups will get their hands on WMDs without the help of a state sponsor.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the list of candidates for state sponsors of terrorism narrowed to Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. Rogue countries like these could—and should—be kept in check by the traditional means available to the United States as a superpower. Hawks in the Bush administration trumpeted a Saddam Hussein-Bin Laden "axis of evil" that justified the 2003 Iraq War. There was no such alliance, although the theoretical model insisted it just had to be there. Ironically, the architects of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Dick Cheney, the Vice-President, Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense, and Paul Wolfowitz, security advisor to George W. Bush, were all political scientists, and adherents of Realist theory. They drew the conclusion that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States was left standing as the "hegemon" in a "unipolar" world. Now it was up to the United States to set the rules. (There was also the idea that in a unipolar world spreading democracy by military force was in the long-term interest of the United States.) Daniel Deudney and John Ikenberry describe the disagreement between interventionists and advocates of restraint as an inter-mural dispute among Realists.[15] This disagreement also does not overlap neatly with partisan political divisions. Democrats and Republicans alike are split between advocates of restraint, bordering on isolationism, and humanitarian "interventionists" accused of perpetuating an "endless" war on global terrorism.

Realists who do not favor military intervention often advocate variants of what they call "offshore" balancing, foregoing direct military interventions and letting the locals handle local problems. "Onshore" deployment brings with it the risk that the United States will make itself responsible for

situations that the country cannot, and need not, control. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are held up as prime examples. However, isolationism cannot put the genie of globalization back in the bottle. Can the United States simply turn away when humanitarian concerns demand intervention? From Cambodia's Pol Pot to Serbian atrocities in Bosnia, and on to genocide in Rwanda and the Islamic State, the American response has been inconsistent. When human rights advocates argue for military intervention to prevent atrocities, Realists are the skeptics at the table.

When it comes to terrorism far away from American shores, Realists of both camps agree that terrorism is a top-down problem. Modify how the leaders act, and so reduce the demand for terrorists. If the demand for terrorists goes away, the terrorists will also go away. Rather like Abrahms, Audrey Cronin argues, in *How Terrorism Ends*, that states should start negotiating with leaders of terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda. It is a weak and divided organization, she writes, which has actually been strengthened by the overreaction of government agencies.[16] Similar views may be found in the works of a number of political scientists: John Muller and Mark G. Stewart, Marc Sageman, and Charles Kurzman, to mention a few.[17] But, as Cronin acknowledges, Al Qaeda has outlived the statistical life expectancy of terrorist groups—and it has repeatedly made a comeback after predictions of its demise.

The Realist worldview suffers from an unrealistically narrow conceptualization of rational action. Terrorist groups base their strategies and actions on their own theories about this world and the next.[18] The Realists assume that the jihadists are either out to get their own patch of land or are proxies for states seeking to control territory. This misconstrues the aims of the jihadist movement. The jihadist worldview is anchored in an apocalyptic vision of an Islamic awakening that will sweep away all borders. With that comes a theory of history, and there follows, logically enough, a blueprint for action that relies on divine intervention.

Al Qaeda has failed many times but has a capacity for recovery unparalleled among terrorist groups. Bin Laden fatally miscalculated how the United States would respond to the 9/11 attacks. The retaliation that followed caused huge damage to him personally and to his organization. But the Realist school has consistently underestimated the resilience of Bin Laden's organization and of the jihadist networks. The state-centric focus of the Realists blinds them to the true strengths of the jihadist movement. The jihadists are capable of adjusting tactics to the facts on the ground. They can

be savvy and flexible exponents of realpolitik. But any accommodations or trade-offs they make are tactical. They will not compromise on the ultimate objective. Any concessions they make are temporary and can only be justified if they are in the interest of the long-term goal. This is to take back control of all territories once governed by Allah's law, the *sharia*. (The boundaries of the territory to be reclaimed are a matter of debate.)

The comparison of the jihadists to national liberation movements or ethno-national separatists, who want their own state, is therefore profoundly misleading. The jihadists have no homeland. They do not want a state for themselves. They want the end of all states. They see the weakening of Muslim states as a vehicle for uniting the imaginary global *ummah*, the borderless Muslim nation of righteous believers. They fight to speed up the process that leads inexorably to the return of the Messiah and the final Day of Judgment. Their ultimate goal is to hasten the coming of the Apocalypse. Until that day comes, they will fight a global holy war.[19] Their apocalyptic dreams may be fantastical, but their means are rational enough.

Wait, wait, skeptics may say, did the Islamic State not proclaim a "state"? They did, but they also declared a worldwide extraterritorial caliphate that was understood by followers as a springboard to global domination. Al Qaeda and the Islamic State had differences about the "state" vs. "caliphate" doctrine. Bin Laden allowed "emirates" but not "caliphates." The disagreement between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State was partly a matter of theory. The faithful had to figure out which step on the escalator to the global jihadist revolution the Syrian civil war had landed on in late 2013, when the jihadists gained the upper hand among the rebel groups fighting the Assad regime. The Al Qaeda view was that by wedding itself to a "state," the Islamic State had neglected the duty to pursue a global revolution. The break-away affiliate would be tied down in a fight for every piece of soil of which it had taken ownership. (The Al Qaeda bosses were right. In March 2019, after dragged out trench warfare, the Islamic State lost control of the last slice of territory in eastern Syria and northern Iraq it had claimed for its caliphate five years previously.)

The jihadists are often depicted as violent thugs but they are more than that. Their tactics and strategies are scripted by elaborate doctrines deduced by a militant intelligentsia. The Islamic State followed a theory for how to progress through the stages of the revolution to the end of history. The author of this theory was a jihadist intellectual who used the alias Abu Bakr Naji. (Naji is allegedly a pseudonym for an Egyptian named Mohammad Hassan Khalil al-Hakim who may have been killed in 2008.)

Naji's roadmap to the jihadist revolution was laid out in a document evocatively titled "The Management of Savagery." (The Arabic title is sometimes translated as "The Management of Barbarism.") The origins of the document are fuzzy. It was published online in 2004 but was probably written earlier.[20] (An English translation by William McCants, an American academic, was published online in 2006.)

The document surfaced years before the split between Al Qaeda and its Iraqi branch, and its author is regarded as an Al Qaeda-affiliated public intellectual. Al Qaeda, too, is deeply wedded to a stage theory of the revolution, albeit not to Naji's timetable.[21] Naji's plan lays out the phases of the revolution over a period of twenty years. The sixth and last phase with the final battle between believers and non-believers was supposed to arrive in 2020. Clearly, Armageddon is now past its due date. Taken literally, it isn't much of a plan. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the logic behind it. The jihadists believe in the laws of history, and history is understood as a march through stages. Violence is more than a means to an end. It is the road leading to the Apocalypse when the *Mahdi*—the Messiah—will appear.

A more prosaic explanation for the Islamic State's desire to establish a state is that the bosses needed the instruments of a state in order to plunder the locals. To realize that objective, they made an alliance with ex-Baathists, former members of Saddam Hussein's regime, who lost their jobs in 2003 when American officials in charge of Iraq's reconstruction decided to ban the party. Baathists are Sunnis, and they preferred an alliance with the Islamic State to submitting to the Shi'a government in Baghdad. Most did not share the globalist jihadist agenda. However, motivated perhaps by religious feelings or by self-interest (or both), thousands of ex-Baathists converted to extremist Islam and joined the jihadist movement. Ex-Baathists formed their own fighter brigade, the Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order. It was declared a terrorist organization in September 2015 after it joined forces with ISIS.[22]

The collaboration between a terrorist group and a disgruntled and marginalized cadre belonging to an ethno-religious faction is a familiar scenario in the Realist framework. According to the Realist script, a diplomatic negotiation team should then step in. Theoretically, negotiations between the Iraqi government and the rebels to formalize some degree of self-governance and autonomy for the Sunni groups, short perhaps of a fully-fledged state

but close enough to allow the factions their own turf. That is not what happened. Saddam-era officers ran three of the twenty-three ministries of government created by the Islamic State: security, military, and finance. But even so, there were problems. "Within days they took the revolution away from us," an ex-Baathist complained to journalists from Reuters in December 2015.[23] He had helped the Islamic State take over Mosul in June 2014, a victory that was critical to the terrorist group's forward march.

The Islamic State did want a state but not as much as they wanted to construct a global organization. In September 2014, fresh from significant conquests in Iraq and Syria, ISIS's spokesman, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani al-Shami, instructed "soldiers of the Islamic State" to conduct attacks against the West. Over the next twelve months, a wave of attacks took place in Europe and the United States, and against tourist targets in North Africa. All were credited to ISIS.

In November 2015, a series of coordinated attacks in Paris carried out by French-Belgian militants who had returned to Europe on the instructions of Islamic State operatives killed 130 people and injured many hundreds. A second punch came in Brussels in March 2016, committed by the same network of Europeans returning from ISIS's insurgent "state" and managed by Frenchmen working for the ISIS high command. The attacks and the networks behind them are described in Chapter 11.

A second school of thought on the roots of terrorism owes more to sociology than to political science. Sociologists often suggest an affinity between the Western jihadists and other, more conventional, bottom-up social movements.[24] The term "social movements" connotes loosely organized and diffuse groupings and tendencies that lack formal organization and are held together by shared identity or by participation in a common campaign. People attracted to such movements are often thought to be driven by a sense of loss, or by outrage, or by fear. At least when applied to terrorism, there is a danger that this will turn into a circular argument: only angry people use violence; therefore, terrorists must be angry and alienated.

"Terrorism needs a sense of alienation from the status quo and a desire to change it," wrote Louise Richardson in the aftermath of the July 2005 attacks on the London Underground.[25] Europe's Muslims were "disenfranchised and disillusioned by the failure of integration."[26] There are different versions of the argument but, broadly, it identifies social disadvantage and discrimination as the root causes of political violence and protest politics.

A working group set up by the British government after the 2005 London Underground bombing sendorsed the alienation thesis declaring, : "the root causes of terrorism are discrimination, deprivation, and alienation facing British Muslims."[27]

This focus on alienation leads to the idea that "homegrown" terrorism, violent acts committed in the name of Al Qaeda, are manifestations of a spontaneous, leaderless, and bottom-up reaction to perceived injustice. Marc Sageman provocatively argued that Al Qaeda does not exist as a coherent organization, except in the minds of counterterrorism officials.[28] Western militants are a self-sufficient "bunches of guys," he argued, and their relationship to Al Qaeda is "aspirational." They are motivated by anger and peer solidarity, and their organization has the characteristics of a "leaderless" social movement.[29]

In an odd twist, Al Qaeda associates often allude to "leaderless resistance."[30] Adam Gadahn, an American who became Al Qaeda's chief press officer, exhorted Muslims not to wait for orders in a videotaped message: "My Muslim brothers, Jihad [...] is the personal duty of every able-bodied Muslim on the face of this earth, until the last Muslim captive is freed and the last piece of occupied Islamic land is recovered and until Muslims live in safety and security in the benevolent shadow of the Islamic state."[31]

Gadahn's words would seem to support Sageman's argument that we are dealing here with a bottom-up movement. His rhetoric may also lend support to the idea that grievances motivate action. They may even bolster the Realist argument that Al Qaeda is at heart a resistance movement seeking national liberation. However, an obvious problem with that interpretation is that the concept of "occupied Islamic land" in Gadahn's speech includes every Muslim state on the map, and also swathes of Europe and Africa that were once part of a larger Muslim empire.

Recruitment tactics and religious rhetoric both inform the things that terrorists say. But what they say should not be confused with the motivations for their actions. In his "Letter to America" in 2002, Bin Laden purported to explain why he had attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. He recited a long list of grievances and demands, including the following: "stop your oppression, lies, immorality and debauchery that has spread among you" and "it is saddening to tell you that you are the worst civilization witnessed by the history of mankind."[32]

Terrorist leaders cloak their motivations in the language of disaffection, but only for rhetorical purposes, to fire up their base and to reconcile sympathizers to their actions. Their true purposes are a different matter, driven by considerations of strategy and tactics. Don't pay too much attention to what the jihadists may answer when you ask why they hate the West. The Realists are right on this point. Anger over Western immorality was not the real motive for the attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. Bin Laden's pronouncements were propaganda directed to his hinterland. He was trying to restore his reputation with Muslim ultra-conservatives who thought he had gone too far.

The reason Bin Laden orchestrated the 9/11 attacks was that he assumed that the United States would then retreat from engagements in the Middle East, in the same way as the Reagan administration withdrew from Lebanon in 1984 after losing Congressional support for the mission when Hezbollah, a Shia militant group, bombed the barracks in Beirut housing U.S. and French troops. The troops were there to prevent war between Israel and Palestinian forces backed by Arab countries. The other example of weak-kneed superpower responses that indelibly shaped Bin Laden's strategy was the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 when the costs of propping up the local People's Front regime got too high. Bin Laden was convinced the jihadists caused the collapse of the Soviet Union, and that the United States was no different. It too would withdraw from the fight when the costs became too high. That Bin Laden's assessment was wrong hardly matters.

The social alienation thesis is notoriously difficult to verify empirically. To the extent that any correlation can be established, it is rarely the most disadvantaged in society but rather middle-class intellectuals or professionals who drive protest movements. That generalization applies also to the jihadist movement. In *Why Men Rebel* (1970), Ted Gurr addressed the empirical observation that the social alienation argument has had little historical basis and modified the argument to speak instead of what he called Relative Deprivation, which refers to the experience of failure to achieve a standard of living to which an individual and a group think themselves entitled.[33] Disappointed expectations rather than poverty fuel revolution. The poor already have low expectations, but intellectuals and the lower-middle classes and professionals are the real revolutionaries.

Olivier Roy, a French sociologist, updated the Relative Deprivation theory to fit the contemporary French situation.[34] In a long essay published in

Le Monde, France's premier intellectual newspaper, on November 25, 2015, just two weeks after the deadly attacks in Paris instigated by the Islamic state, Roy argued that people misinterpreted the jihadist movement. The headline said it all: "Jihadism is a generational and nihilistic revolt."[35] France's problem is with angry young Muslims, and this had nothing to do with the "caliphate" in Syria or with Islamic fundamentalism. The angry new generation isn't much interested in religion, he wrote. Its members know nothing about Islam. They do not become jihadist after a journey of religious radicalization. The current terrorist wave is not like the nationalist or neo-Marxist groups of the past. France is dealing "not with the radicalization of Islam but with the Islamization of radicalism." Young men from poor urban communities self-radicalize in peer groups, in their neighborhoods and on the streets. They bring along brothers and sisters. In the process, they turn against family and the local, established Muslim community.

The social profiles of the young men responsible for some of the major French terrorist incidents attributed to Al Qaeda or its affiliates do fit the profile described by Roy. The Kouachi brothers, the shooters responsible for the attack in January 2015 on the satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, were orphans who grew up in a Catholic orphanage. Their friend and fellow assassin, Amedy Coulibaly, was a French-Malian, who came from a secular background. These men did not grow up in Salafist enclaves. They encountered French jihadist networks not in the *banlieues* (suburbs) but in French prisons.[36]

A number of French jihadists do fit the young, Muslim, and angry profile. However, many, many French Muslims fit that description of young, angry, and disappointed without ever turning to terrorist violence. Most people have grievances. Only the marginal few join a terrorist organization.

Psychological motivations vary. Moreover, the reasons people join a terrorist network may not be the same as those that motivate them to commit an act of terror. The suicide bomber may sign up hoping to become a martyr and to ascend directly to heaven, but when the moment comes to pull the trigger there may simply be no opportunity for second thoughts. (The Islamic State notoriously welded suicide bombers into the cars delivering the bombs, so they could not escape.) Along the road from novice to hardened fighter, PTSD, coercion, and indoctrination, often in the form of a choice between a death as a martyr or at the hands of comrades, or plain delusion, and any combination of these elements, may set in. For these reasons, John Horgan, a criminal psychologist and political scientist, whose

research spans ideological genres of terrorism, argues that we should ask how rather than why people become terrorists. Why we cannot answer.[37]

Some fancy the excitement of fighting with a band of brothers. Some claim that they were directed to join by divine revelation. It is tricky, perhaps impossible to generalize about psychological motivations.

Terrorists often put the blame for bloodshed on the West. "Violence did not originate from us. France and the USA started the killings. Once they stop, we'll stop." Personal conversion stories, however, typically cite a dream or divine intervention. "I got stuck on the highway with no money, gas, or food. I was sick, and my wife was overwhelmed." Then an unknown man appears. "He asked me to follow him. I looked back and suddenly there were no cars. Don't ask me for an explanation. I have none. It was Allah." These are quotes from the account of a Frenchman named Rachid Kassim.[38] Kassim became a high-level operative for the Islamic State. On behalf of the Islamic State, he directed by phone, from the "caliphate," the execution of a couple in a French suburb while their two-year-old looked on. He also provided instructions to two nineteen-year-old Frenchmen who beheaded an eighty-nine-year-old priest in Normandy in 2016.[39]

Some recruits are simply enchanted with the utopian project. In 1993, a twenty-five-year-old British Pakistani, Moazzem Begg, who grew up in Birmingham, arrived in a training camp for the *mujahideen*, the guerrillas who in the 1980s had fought against Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Years later, Begg described his experience in breathless tones. "The Afghan visit was a life-changing experience for me. No few days have ever affected me like that. I had met men who seemed to me exemplary in their faith and self-sacrifice, and seen a world that awed and inspired me."[40]

These statements do not support the supposition that the militants are attracted to the movement because they were angry, didn't fit in at home, or found doors closing in their faces. These are statements by people who are motivated by a vision, excitement, and a desire to be part of a new society.

In any case, the social demography of the Western terrorists varies greatly from time to time and from country to country, down to the most typical age at which they join. Who becomes a terrorist depends in part on the job descriptions put out by the terrorist organizations. It is only recently, for example, that women were allowed to apply. The trend towards recruitment in prisons is in part due to the growing presences of jihadists in prisons, often serving long sentences. The United States has seen large numbers of converts join the ranks, whereas in France comparatively few converts are

recruited. Such differences may be explained by national differences between Western states with respect to their dealings with vulnerable population groups. It may also be, simply, that the recruiters work different levers, opportunistically, to bring people on board.

Then there are those who think Islam is the problem. Gilles Kepel, a French Arabist, argues that the real issue is the breakdown of authority in Islam. If Islam were better policed from within, we would not have a global problem with people like Bin Laden running around pretending that they are authorized to pronounce religious rulings. In his book, *The War for Muslim Minds* (2006), Kepel argued that the problem at the heart of our predicament with Islamist extremism is a grand competition for religious control in Sunni Islam.

Many Muslim religious leaders agree with Kepel. The argument plays different ways. It is true that traditional Islam long ago made peace with the secular state. Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, a professor of law at Emory University, argues that, historically, Islam has been pragmatic about accommodating Islamic religious law with the secular state, and would do well to be more accommodating to social change.[41] The absence of a centralized high command in Islam has historically allowed local customs to blend in with the faith. But decentralization can also be a curse because it allows sects and autocrats to chart out their own path.

More recently, Kepel has sharpened his argument. The problem is to be found in a confrontation between "good" Islam and "bad" Islam. But now he argues that the origin of "bad" religion is not a matter of a lack of religious authority among those who know best. Rather, the blame rests with secular leftists. "Bad Islam" gained traction thanks to the French Left's embrace of multiculturalism and its toleration of identity politics. "Two kinds of protest movements have developed alongside each other," he argued.[42] The left and the right operate as tactical "frenemies" in their confrontation with the secular state. The misbehavior of one party provides justifications for the other. Kepel's explanation appealed to neo-conservatives who like to see extremism as the fault of left-wing multiculturalism. However, they generally ignored the fact that Kepel also blamed the French nationalists for the breakdown of republican decorum.

But Kepel's argument is inadequate because it limits itself to France. Jihadist extremism is not a French problem. It was—and is—a problem all over Europe. The recruitment networks that sent French men and women to the Islamic State and the attack networks that are responsible for the

many recent violent incidents did not arise from multicultural coddling of extremist identity politics.

Another school of thought about the roots of jihadist terrorism takes off from what is broadly called organization theory. I include under this rubric network theory, a general approach to understanding how things work that has broad applications in sociology, economics, and epidemiology. Organization theory draws on economic sociology, which developed in reaction to more abstract approaches in economics. Writing in 1937, Ronald Coase, an economist and a founding member of the organization theory school, memorably summed up this thinking: "If a workman moves from department Y to department X, he does not go because of a change in relative prices but because he is ordered to do so."[43] Organization theory is focused on how human behavior is shaped by structures and contexts. The basic axioms are simple: individuals make decisions contingent on what they know, what works for them, and how they may most efficiently obtain the result that they desire, at least in the short term. The bosses call the shots. The employees follow. Herbert Simon, another famous economist in this school and a Nobel Prize winning economist (1978), called its basic principle "bounded rationality."

Modern organization theory has gone through many updates since the works of the founding fathers. Interesting applications in the study of terrorism include Jacob N. Shapiro's book *The Terrorist's Dilemma* (2013), in which Shapiro argues that terrorist groups control their members in the same way as business leaders manage their organizations.[44] Terrorist groups have leaders and followers, and the leaders tell the followers when and how to fight, and when to die. They are rule-driven organizations because ideology determines what is legitimate and what is not, where to hit and where to refrain from direct attack.

Another example of counterintuitive inferences following from this way of thinking is Alexander Gutfraind's theory of a "sink-line" tipping point, where terrorist groups go into decline.[45] To stay in business, a terrorist organization must grow, replace losses, and if possible expand its ranks, while preserving core strategic objectives. Leaders face a dilemma. To stay true to the objectives and to recruit new members, terrorist bosses must order attacks. Attacks mean members will die or get caught by law enforcement agencies. In other words, to make the business grow the bosses must sacrifice members. If too many members are sacrificed and not enough new recruits are brought on board, the organization will sink. If the bosses protect

members by ordering fewer attacks, and if they themselves seek out safe havens, the business will also suffer. Bruce Hoffman's evocative comparison of Al Qaeda to a shark that "must keep moving forward, no matter how slow or incrementally, or die" serves as an apt metaphor for the logic driving Al Qaeda's business model.[46]

A number of different models have been proposed to describe the management structures of the transnational networks that linked Western followers to terrorist central command abroad. Miles Kahler has argued that Al Qaeda should be studied in the same way as criminologists study a transnational crime cartel. Like them, Al Qaeda is in the business of transporting people, money, and contraband across borders.[47] Other models range from control-and-command structures to self-managed "leaderless" cells. The reality is that both types of cells may be observed. The efficient and consistent coordination of complex illegal operations across countries require a centralized command and control structure. For that purpose, a transnational networked organization can protect the bosses against exposure when things go wrong and arrests are made by placing operatives and bosses in different jurisdictions. Mimicking a social movement and spreading the word through the channels available in free societies, in contrast, better serve proselytizing and recruitment objectives.

Surprisingly counterintuitive inferences follow. One is that terrorist organizations that operate in highly competitive markets are likely to be more violent than those that enjoy something approaching a local monopoly. (Empirical evidence suggests this is broadly accurate.)[48] However, weaker organizations may also have to become more violent in order to attract support and new members. The primary purpose of violence is control—but it also works as propaganda and to recruit new followers.

Controlling the message and the manpower has historically been important to the jihadist organizations. Al Qaeda and the Islamic State could be remarkably bureaucratic. The plans drawn up for Al Qaeda at the organization's founding meeting resembled a Third World government bureaucracy, with directorates for requisition and finances; employment contracts for foreign fighters stipulating their pay and rest and recreation days off from combat contingent on status (married, not married); and vouchers in lieu of monetary rewards, etc. The organization plan had more boxes in the diagram than there were people present at the meeting and the sparseness of Bin Laden's organization was such that it seemed unlikely that enough officers could be found to fill all the offices.

Years later, Morten Storm, a Danish defector, complained that every time there were three people in a cell, one of them had to be appointed emir, the boss of the others.[49] Storm joined the British *al-Muhajiroun* in the late 1990s and went to Yemen where he became a soldier for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), the affiliate based in Yemen. There he encountered the same bureaucratic mindset. (Storm himself became an undercover agent for Western intelligence in 2004.) The Islamic State was similarly addicted to bureaucracy. Leaks of intake interviews conducted by Islamic State managers in 2014 provided clues to a massively bureaucratic structure that underpinned the terrorist organization's control over the rank and file.[50]

One inference from these observations is that terrorist organizations may recruit much like organizations engaging in protest politics. They bring people on board, make them feel they are morally right, and make sure they develop thick personal relationships to fellow activists, and perhaps even marry into the movement. Another is that terrorism is not simply a means to an end, as Pape and other Realists have argued. It is also the business that justifies the organization and keeps the leaders employed. It is a product used to sell the brand and recruit new members.

The comparisons to crime syndicates and Third World bureaucracies go only so far. When the terrorist organization needs to transfer resources—manpower or capital—it is likely to operate in the crime syndicate mode. But crime syndicates want to stay hidden and terrorists need to claim responsibility for criminal acts so as to advertise an agenda. Terrorism is a form for violent theater, as Brian M. Jenkins wrote years ago.[51] Targets and methods are selected to convey a message. Terrorists need to brag about what they do. Violence is their product, and their advertisement. They need to let the public know what they have done or else they will not gain credit, which after all is what they want. A terrorist organization is a political proselytizing organization, a capital raising entity, and a military organization all in one.

In this book, I draw on modern organization theory and in particular on network theory. Using empirical evidence, I will show that jihadist managers and operatives rely upon networked social contagion, mechanisms that involve friendship groups, propagandists, and locally based leaders, to build their transnational organizations.[52]

And what brings people to the cause? My answer is, networks.[53] This is, of course, true of lots of things that happen in the course of a life. People get

jobs through networks.[54] They get married through networks. They join churches and go on pilgrimages through networks. In their book, *Connected* (2009), Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler analyzed how networks determine behaviors and developed what they called the Three Degrees of Influence Rule, which holds that influence networks work through your friends (first degree), the friends of friends (second degree), and the friends' friends' friends (third degree).[55] Ideas spread through networks. Innovation does, too. Studying civil rights activists who had risked life and imprisonment by engaging in civil disobedience in 1964, the sociologist Douglas McAdam concluded that simply knowing someone who was already engaged in the movement made recruitment to this high-risk political activity much more likely.[56] Today a person—certainly a young person—is likely to catch an idea through online social networks. But terrorism does not stay online. It happens offline, in real-life collaborations and networks.

Network theory suggests a simple hypothesis: to become a terrorist, you first have to know one. Norms, contacts, and opportunities flow through networks. Individuals belonging to the same network tend to see themselves as socially similar, and they are therefore predisposed to find value in the same ideas and behaviors. The social contagion mechanisms by means of which jihadist radicalization is transmitted are not very different from those that lead people to become anti-federalists or to join cults and other high-risk, adversarial belief communities. Empirical studies, some of which will be discussed in detail later in the book, support an understanding of radicalization as a psychosocial process that involves reinforcement by peers and communities.[57]

Networks are often thought of as a "good thing." Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone* (2002), presented the decline of inter-personal social networks as the cause of social disengagement and decline. The book did much to represent social networks in a rosy glow. Putnam said networks build "social capital," a civic investment in societal investment and growth.

Twenty years later, a tectonic shift brought along by online media has people thinking differently about the benefits of networking. Social capital has many guises, and not all are for the good of society, or for the individual caught up in them. Victor Asal, a political scientist, describes "dark" networks as social capital gone wrong and utilized for evil purposes.[58] "Thick" social networks, which rely on family ties, kinship, and peer groups to build cohesion and control may support investment and progress, and civic and

economic development; but they can also confine their members in a social prison, or be mobilized for illicit purpose.

Social contagion models have been used to study the spread of public health problems such as obesity and smoking, and also to study opinion formation and the spread of innovations. Social contagion through networks, online or offline, whether based on geographical or cultural proximity, peer groups or self-chosen identities, is a well-established way to describe and explain the spread of a range of behaviors in public health, economics, and sociology and political science.[59] Herbert Blumer, a sociologist whose work on social contagion was inspired by the turbulence of the 1930s, regarded social contagion as central to a broad range of group behaviors that individuals would not undertake under normal circumstances—e.g. "crowds, mobs, panics, manias, dancing crazes, stampedes, mass behavior, public opinion, propaganda, fashion, fads, social movements, revolutions, and reforms."[60] Violent extremism fits right in.[61]

In epidemiology, contagion is the mechanism through which diseases are spread by direct contact between a sick and a healthy person. This is contact, or "simple" contagion. The coronavirus pandemic has made this type of contagion familiar to everybody. Catching an idea or a behavior from another person is obviously a different matter. It involves volition, opportunity, and access. The individual has to be receptive to the ideas. And to execute the program of action, there must be an organization of fellow believers capable of providing direction and reinforcement. It is more accurate to identify *facilitated complex social contagion* as the mechanism by which extremism grows. It is *facilitated* because savvy operators can manipulate a recruitment networks to promote contagion. *Complex* (rather than simple) contagion is involved because *social* reinforcement is required. A person is more likely to join a group holding particular views if he or she has affirmative connections with others who subscribe to the same ideas.

Network theory is a methodology that provides a way of analyzing social structures. But network structures themselves tend to produce certain outcomes, simply because of the way in which they are built to work.[62] They are relatively durable and compelling instruments for resource mobilization and organization. Taking network structures as explanations of social action is an example of what Robert Merton described as middle-range theories; theories that can guide empirical inquiry and are "intermediate to general theories of social systems which are too remote from particular classes of social behavior, organization, and change."[63]

Organization of the book

The book is organized chronologically. Roughly, three cycles of expansion, collapse, and regeneration can be identified in the evolution of Al Qaeda. Each cycle produced distinct waves of new mobilization of Western followers. The organization of the chapters in this book follows a chronology of mobilization cycles that have driven the expansion of the Western branches of the global jihadist movement.

Figure 1.1. depicts the rising number of followers in Western countries between 1992 and 2018. The three curves chart the number of verified arrests, deaths, and the first attempts to go abroad as a foreign fighter by year. (The methodological Appendix explains the coding protocol.)

The number of new Western recruits traveling aboard to join jihadist groups and training camps had started to rise before the 9/11 attacks in

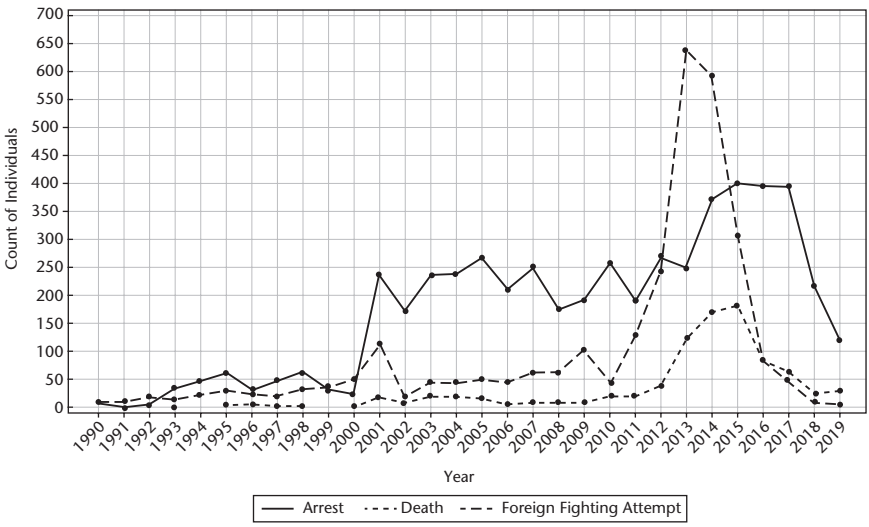

Figure 1.1. Count of individuals in dataset by years of first terrorism-related arrest, death, and first instance of foreign fighting.

Note: N = 6,393 (total). 135 do not have information about any of the three variables tracked. First terrorism-related arrests: N = 5,200 (0 missing values). Foreign Fighters (FF) for the first time: N = 3,057 (103 missing year of first attempt). Deaths: N = 903 (12 missing year of death). An individual theoretically may be included in all three lines, as first arrested, as first known instance of foreign fighter, and as dead. Total N includes individuals with Western citizenship or residence only. Created in R using ggplot.

Source: Western Jihadism Project.

2001. Recruitment increased again in the aftermath of the attacks. After a brief dip in 2002, attributable to the closure of the camps in Afghanistan, the activity level picked up again. The 9/11 attacks did not deter Westerners from signing up for Bin Laden's project. Decade-by-decade, the steady-state numbers of first-time offenders have ratcheted up. The prevalence of domestic arrests and with some delay also deaths increased sharply in 2013 and 2014. The increase in both measures are attributable to the mobilization wave associated with the rise of the Islamic State.

Chapter 2 focuses on Bin Laden's education and myth making, and presents a novel account of his own trajectory to extremism and personal attachments to the West, and to Britain in particular. Chapter 3 is focused on Bin Laden's role in the 1993 World Trade Center attack and the development of Al Qaeda's bases in the United States. The chapter described the importance of Bin Laden's alliance with two Egyptian terrorist groups in exile, one headed by al-Zawahiri, and the other by Omar Abdel-Rahman, the "Blind Sheikh in Brooklyn." Chapter 4 deals with Bin Laden's years in Sudan (1991–1996). These are sometimes seen as a hiatus, a time when Bin Laden was between "jobs."[64] This is not accurate. It was from Sudan that he began funding bridgeheads in Europe and in the United States, worked with his Egyptian associates to plan and manage the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan, initiated the plans that resulted in the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, and took the first steps leading to the 9/11 strike. Chapter 5 is about Al Qaeda's London office and Bin Laden's takeover of the North African jihadist groups. Chapter 6 presents an account of the 9/11 attacks and the aftermath, the counterstrike by the United States that nearly crushed Al Qaeda.

The second part of the book traces the movement's recovery after the 9/11 attacks and the emergence of what came to be described as "homegrown" terrorism. The wave was long thought to be the work of "leaderless" cells of alienated young Muslim descendants of immigrants to Western European countries. Today, the consensus is that Bin Laden was directly involved in the planning of the Madrid train bombings (2004) and oversaw the planning of the London bombings (2005) while in hiding. Computer files seized during the raid on Bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, on May 2, 2011, showed that Bin Laden had been involved, as a U.S. official said, in directing "every recent major Al Qaeda attack" against the West.[65] Michael Morell, the CIA Deputy Director at the time, writes in his autobiography that the agency had been surprised to learn that Bin

Laden had been "micromanaging" the organization and was "intimately involved in attack planning."[66] My research shows, however, that neither story is entirely accurate. Bin Laden was not sidelined, but neither was he omnipresent. Action scripts provided by the ideology and the social structure of the organization gave leadership and coordination.

Chapter 7 describes the integration of the Western cells with Al Qaeda's command structure during the years of what became known as "homegrown" terrorism and produced the train bombings in Madrid (2004) and in London (2005), and many more less known terrorist events. Chapter 8 explains some core concepts in the jihadist belief system, as they were understood by a veteran Danish-Algerian foreign fighter who spent several years in Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp (GTMO). (He died fighting for the Al-Nusra Front, an Al Qaeda affiliate, in Syria.) A demographic picture of the American jihadists and their roles in the global organization as propagandists and web masters is presented in Chapter 9. Chapter 10 is an in-depth study of the two brothers responsible for the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013.

The third part of the book tracks the recruitment tactics that fueled the wave of migration to the Islamic State and which radically changed the demographics of a new generation of Western militants. Chapter 11 analyzes the roles played by the Western recruits in the jihadist movement, as leaders and as grunts. The last chapter, Chapter 12, looks to the future. The structural factors that have driven jihadist regeneration in the past are intact. They are even being revitalized, and they include more people in more places than ever before.

As this book goes to print, we are in a lull. A decline in arrest and incidents that began in 2018 has continued. In 2020, the global pandemic shut down international travel. Terrorists fear the virus too. Travel opportunities are more restricted and more strictly monitored. There are still regular arrests and prosecutions, and lone-attacker incidents. Europol reported a total of 436 individuals arrested on suspicion of jihadist terrorist offenses in 2019. EU citizens accounted for 242 of those arrested. Over half of the attacks were committed by citizens in their own countries. Ten people died in 2019 as a result of terrorist incidents. The number of incidents attributed to right-wing extremist grew significantly in the same period, but all deaths in the European Union that were due to terrorism resulted from jihadist actions.[67]

Whatever and whenever Al Qaeda is perceived to suffer a setback, there is talk that Al Qaeda is at last on its way out. In his book, *The Rise and Fall of Al Qaeda* (2011), Fawaz Gerges argued that U.S. government narratives have allowed "a ragtag guerilla force to portray themselves as legitimate Muslim warriors."[68] Worse, excessive counterterrorism policies alienated Muslims and gifted the extremists a large audience. Shortly after Gerges' book was published, Al-Zawahiri sent veteran Al Qaeda men to eastern Syria to set up a fighter group. By December, the first wave of veteran fighters from Europe made their way to join *Jabhat al-Nusra*, Al Qaeda's newest organization, which was officially launched in January 2012. Two years later, the new "caliphate" controlled a geographic area the size of the United Kingdom and Britons had filmed themselves committing crimes against humanity that they uploaded to YouTube and Twitter. Excessive counterterrorism causing alienation can hardly be faulted for the wave of new recruits to the global jihadist movement that followed. The United States sat on its hands for three years. Muslim parents were enraged that their governments did so little to stop the migration.

In 2017, Daniel Byman likened Al Qaeda to "to social media companies like Friendster or Myspace that initially succeeded and pioneered many important techniques but eventually saw competitors reap the benefits."[69] Byman does not think jihadist terrorism is a shadow on the wall conjured up to grow military budgets. But he argues that we should accept that Al Qaeda itself is yesterday's news, and instead focus on the other organizations in the global movement that Al Qaeda fostered. He identified the 2005 London bombings as Al Qaeda's last successful mass casualty attack in Europe. However, further attacks have since been carried out by Al Qaeda affiliates and recently by Al Qaeda's rival, the Islamic State.

The fact is that the affiliates *are* Al Qaeda. AQAP, the branch organization based in Yemen, was deputized to attack the West in the name of Al Qaeda, in part because it had excellent outreach to Western militants and travelers with passports that could get them on flights heading to the United States. It is also not correct that Al Qaeda Central ceased terrorist operations against the West after 2005. In 2008, Al Qaeda took responsibility for the bombing of the Danish embassy in Pakistan to punish the country for allowing a newspaper to publish cartoons of Muhammad. Al Qaeda also laid plans to kidnap and execute the editorial staff of the newspaper that published the infamous cartoons.

Ilyas Kashmiri, a veteran operative who worked for both Al Qaeda and Mullah Omar's Taliban, deputized the operational planning of the plot to David Coleman Headley, a Pakistani-American, who traveled twice to Denmark to scout out the targets.[70] Headley went so far as to walk into the newspaper's building in Copenhagen where he pretended to want to place an ad. The plot was modeled on the November 2008 assault in Mumbai, for which Headley also did the pre-attack scouting. (He was sentenced to thirty-five years in prison in 2013 after a trial in U.S. federal court in Chicago.)

In 2009, simultaneous attacks in New York City and in Manchester were foiled.[71] The master planner was Adnan Shukrijumah, an American from Florida, who joined Al Qaeda around the time of the 9/11 attacks. The coordinated strikes were supposed to be another signature Al Qaeda operation. It was foiled and forgotten, and is left off the list.[72] In 2010, Al Qaeda took responsibility for a bombing of a German bakery in Mumbai, India.

The civil war in Syria was an interlude, a tactical retreat by Al Qaeda from its campaign against the "far enemy." The hiatus ended on December 6, 2019, when a Saudi cadet on a military exchange program, Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani, shot and killed three U.S. sailors inside a classroom on a U.S. Naval base in Pensacola, Florida. Four months later, the government accessed his iPhone and discovered that Alshamrani had been in touch with handlers from Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) before the attack and for years before he arrived in the United States.[73] It was an "insider attack" conducted in the signature style of AQAP. Alshamrani had been radicalized as early as 2015. He was directed by his handlers in AQAP to join the Royal Saudi Air Force, and with that cover to undertake a terrorist mission in the United States. The objective of the mission was, as always, to compel the United States to withdraw from collaboration with the "near enemy," Saudi Arabia. Initially, the reaction was the one the terrorists hoped for. In the aftermath of the shooting, the Pentagon reacted by suspending all operational training for 900 Saudi military students on American bases. A stricter vetting program was also announced for an estimated 5,200 Saudi Arabian students in the United States, making it more difficult for Saudis to study at American universities.

This book provides little support for the "declinist" thesis that Al Qaeda is "over." Nor does it support the notion that crude and badly targeted counterterrorism policies are counterproductive and end up providing Al Qaeda and ISIS with newly alienated followers. These arguments

misconstrue both why and how people living in Western societies end up joining the global jihadist movement. They also tend to understate the threat the jihadists posed to American interests.

The migration of thousands of foreign fighters to join jihadist groups in the Syrian civil war mobilized the Western bases and brought many new recruits to the global struggle. Not only did the movement grow in size, it also diffused across the map and set up footholds in small and midsized cities across North America and Western Europe, and further afield. A new cadre of trained operatives and professional fighters with military training was created. So, the underlying structural factors that have historically allowed Al Qaeda and the global jihadist movement to regenerate are still in place. Outposts and networks are still there, with the potential to support fresh strikes.

Notes

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2

The Founder

On May 2, 2011, Osama Bin Laden was killed by a unit of the U.S. Navy's Special Forces known as SEAL Team 6.[1] Years of detective work had led the CIA to the house in Pakistan, where Bin Laden had been in hiding for five years with three of his wives, his children and grandchildren. Four other people were killed in the raid: Bin Laden's adult son, Khalid, two brothers who had acted as housekeepers, and one of their wives. When they departed, the SEALs carried away Bin Laden's body. The next day, he was buried in the Arabian Sea, dropped overboard from a Navy ship.

The SEALs also took with them papers and the hard drives from computers found in the house, and they made an inventory of Bin Laden's library. This Abbottabad hoard led the intelligence community to revise their assessment of Bin Laden's role during his years in hiding. Conventional wisdom had had it that his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, rather than Bin Laden had been running the organization. That view was now revised. Bin Laden's correspondence showed that he had been in constant—if irregular—correspondence with al-Zawahiri and other members of the top command, and that he was directly involved in the planning of attacks on the West. Michael Morell, deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) at the time of the raid, later wrote that Bin Laden had been issuing orders and micromanaging the organization from his hideaway, "approving personnel appointments, approving how money was spent, and intimately involved in attack planning."[2]

My aim in this chapter is to provide a correction to simplistic views of Bin Laden as a "man in a cave," a throwback to a different age coming back to haunt the West. Files from the cache taken from the house in Abbottabad have been translated and they can now be found on a website titled "Bin Laden's Bookshelf" maintained by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI).[3] More documents were released by the CIA and

posted online.[4] Documents are also available in Arabic and in translation on the website for the Harmony Project archives of the West Point Combating Terrorism Center.[5]

The cache of documents not only revealed Bin Laden's ongoing leadership role. They also provided new insights into his thinking. The compound had no internet connection, but Bin Laden had books and reports written by American academics brought in by the couriers who kept him connected to the world. (Copies of some of these books are also on my bookshelves.) He followed the news and persuaded himself that the financial crisis of 2008 was a harbinger of the end of Western imperialism.

In October 2010, six months before his death, Bin Laden wrote to a trusted associate: "[t]hey struck us and we will strike them back. Anyone who looks at the enemies in NATO, especially America, will know that they are in big trouble. This year has been the worst year for them in Afghanistan since they invaded it. The number of their dead has never been this high according to their own reports. Their financial crisis continues. Britain has lowered its defense budget and America is reducing the budget of the Pentagon." He continued: "Anyone who knows the world and knows politics, knows that it is impossible for them to continue with the war. There is no difference between them and the Soviet Union before it withdrew from Afghanistan."[6] Bin Laden's view that the United States would collapse on its own from the strain of fighting the righteous troops under his command was formed in 1989 when he, mistakenly, concluded that the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan had brought the Soviet Union to its collapse. Twenty years on, he held fast to the theory.

Other new sources have emerged in recent years that provide intimate, often surprising insights into Bin Laden's life and more private behaviors. Family members, former associates, undercover agents, and employees who turned against him, including one of his bodyguards, have published books.[7] An extraordinary book, *The Exile* (2017), by Cathy Scott-Clark and Adrian Levy, tells the story of what happened after Bin Laden, his family, and close associates survived the military assault on Al Qaeda's bases in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks. Bin Laden and some of the family went to North West Pakistan where friendly jihadist groups took them in. One of his wives, six of his children and 11 of his grandchildren ended up in house arrest in Iran. The book is based, in part, on conversations with Abu Hafs al-Mauritani. The name is an alias for Mahfouz Ould al-Walid, who was confined to house arrest in Iran for more than a decade after the flight from Afghanistan and

on interviews with the wives and members of their families.[8] Few declassified government sources or other archives cover this period, so the book is the more valuable for that reason.

The accounts are not always reliable or consistent. There is also inevitably an element of self-censorship, since the authors are reluctant to say anything that might cause them to end up in American court. Even so, a picture emerges of Bin Laden as a man who was obsessed with his role in history. Life in hiding was a strain. Some of his sons left and went back to Saudi Arabia. Others were killed. Two wives left him. Family life was strained by quarrels between the wives, and his efforts to control his sprawling family were not entirely successful. Scattered in the stories are also suggestions about personal cowardice and errors in judgment stemming from his delusional visions of the inevitable downfall of America at the hands of the jihadists. All in all, the new sources yield a more nuanced and reliable account of Bin Laden's personal experiences with Western society that shows how he carefully curated his image to become an iconic figure for a deeply anti-Western religious movement.

The education of Osama Bin Laden

Osama Bin Laden was born in 1957 in Riyadh, the only child of Muhammed Bin Laden's tenth wife, A'alia Ghanem. (She is now known as Hamida al-Attas, after her second husband.) When Osama was two, his parents divorced. The reasons for the divorce are not known, but Bin Laden Sr. married and divorced more than twenty times in his lifetime. It may be that Osama's mother was not meant to be a permanent wife. After the divorce, she was conveniently married off to an employee in the Bin Laden family corporation.

The convention in traditional Muslim societies is that in the event of divorce young children follow their mother, rejoining the father upon reaching puberty. The young Osama accordingly went to live with his mother and her second husband, and was integrated into her family. The men in the family were monogamous. The women dressed in the Western style. Summers were spent with the mother's family in Latakia, Syria, an ancient city with a mixed population of Christians, and Shia and Sunni Muslims. The Assad family that controls Syria today comes from the same area. The Assads are Alawites, a Shia sect, and it has been suggested that Bin Laden's mother was an Alawite. Mixed marriages between Sunni and Shia Muslims were not uncommon in the region in those days.[9]

Muhammed Bin Laden made a fortune modernizing the highways of Saudi Arabia and building homes for members of the royal family. He died in an airplane accident when Osama was ten. Allegedly, Osama had only once spoken directly with his father, and father and son had met in person only five times.[10] After the death of the patriarch, the first-born son, Salem Bin Laden, took over the management of the corporation. Still only in his twenties, Salem was a cosmopolitan, pleasure-loving young man. He had attended an English boarding school and married an English woman. He and his young brothers, sisters and cousins were frequent visitors to London. In his book *The Bin Ladens*, Steve Coll describes Salem Bin Laden's excursions to California and Las Vegas where he gambled and drank alcohol, forbidden activities according to Islam and certainly prohibited by the Wahhabi theology. He also had American girlfriends.[11]

Following the rules at home and ignoring them when out of the country is nothing new. It wasn't that Salem and the other Bin Ladens were not religious. They just practiced Islam in the relaxed manner that was common among the elite throughout the region in the 1970s.

Bin Laden Sr. emphasized the importance of an English education for his children, and his wishes would have been attended to after his death. His sons were sent to boarding schools in Lebanon. The favored eldest sons, who were destined to inherit the management of the sprawling business, went on to schools in the United Kingdom. Some of their sisters also attended English-language boarding schools. Osama himself was a boarder at a Quaker-run English-language school in Beirut, but not for long.[12] A dozen of Bin Laden's half-brothers, even a half-sister, went on to study at universities in the United States. After the school in Beirut, Osama was enrolled in an elite secular high school in Jeddah that taught a curriculum stressing science.[13]

Osama had more direct experience of the West than has been thought by his detractors and admirers alike.[14] When he was thirteen, he traveled to the United Kingdom for medical treatment. It is not known what he was treated for. The following year, he attended a language course in London and spent weekends in Oxford and in Shakespeare's hometown, Stratford-on-Avon. Abdel Bari Atwan, a London-based Palestinian journalist and editor of *Al-Quds Al-Arabia*, has written about this trip and Bin Laden's other trips to London.[15]

Stories about Bin Laden's travels to Europe have been a matter of controversy due to the assertion that he was "radicalized" as a teen by his

revulsion against Western immorality. Among the discoveries in Abbottabad was a personal journal that Bin Laden was writing at the time of his death. The journal included reminiscences of his London trips as a teenager.[16] "The first time I went to the West was during a sixth grade vacation in 89 *Hijri*, 69 A.D. [1970], I was 13, to receive a treatment," he wrote. "In the following year, I went in the summer to Britain and stayed there for approximately 2.5 months. The following year I felt that I shouldn't go and I realized that a committed person doesn't go to the West and I refused to go. My impression was that they are loose people and my age did not allow me to paint [to see] a full picture of their lives. Every Sunday we go to visit [present tense used in the original] the house of Shakespeare. We saw that it is a society different than our society and it is morally decayed."[17] The journal reads like a draft of an autobiography written with an eye on posterity. It is not entirely honest. Bin Laden did in fact return to London later in life, and in the early 1990s he even considered moving there.

After the 9/11 attacks, a Swedish newspaper dug up an old story about a visit by Bin Laden to the country in the early 1970s. A teenager, Osama allegedly traveled with a group of half-siblings led by the eldest brother, Salem. Salem himself had first visited Sweden in 1969 to sign a contract for the purchase of 200 trucks from Volvo in Gothenburg. During the visit, the locals took the young Saudi to the hippest discotheque in the area, which was in Falun, a small town nearby, and Salem made friends with the owners of the discotheque. He subsequently made several visits to Sweden. Once, in 1971, combining business with pleasure, he flew a party of siblings to Copenhagen and then drove them up to Falun. A photograph of the traveling party of twenty-three Bin Laden siblings appeared in the local newspaper. They are standing in front of a Cadillac parked on the town's main street (see Photo 2.1.).

A national Swedish paper, *Aftonbladet*, republished the photo in 2001, after the 9/11 attacks.[18] The paper went back to Falun and interviewed local people about their memories of visits from the Bin Laden family. Among those interviewed was the housekeeper of the hotel where the party stayed. She and other locals were certain that Osama had been part of the group.[19] Osama was identified as the young teenager standing in the middle row, number two from the right. The gaggle of young family members is dressed in the contemporary style of young people in Europe and the United States. The men grew their hair long, and they are all wearing tight turtleneck

Photo 2.1. The Bin Laden siblings on a visit to Falun, Sweden, in 1971. The fourteen-year old Osama is (allegedly) standing second from the right leaning against the car. Reproduced with permission. © Dalmas/Scanpix/Sipa USA.

sweaters and bellbottom pants in the style of the time. None of the women are covering their hair or their faces, and they wear the same style of pants the men wear.

The picture was reprinted in 2001 in several British and European papers but, curiously, the reprint showed the family wearing garishly colored clothes. The original photograph was in black and white. In the early 1970s, newspapers did not print color photos. Color was added to the reprints in a newspaper office somewhere. The photo reprinted here is the original version.

Doubts have been raised about the identification of Osama in the photo. Steven Coll concluded that despite the insistence of the Swedish hosts, Osama did not come along on that trip to Sweden. Coll's source is Carmen Bin Laden, the divorced sister-in-law of one of Osama's half-brothers. She was adamant that Osama had not been part of the trip.[20] She also told Coll that Osama went abroad only three times, once as a ten-year-old with his mother for medical treatment in London, once with the family on safari in East Africa, and once with his first wife to the United States.[21] However, as

Bin Laden's entries to his journal show, Carmen was mistaken about the young Osama's travels. She may also have been wrong about the trip to Sweden. She married into the family only in 1974, after the trip.

According to Lawrence Wright, Osama had a religious awakening when he was fourteen, around the time of his language course in London. Wright's source is an interview with his mother, A'alia Ghanem, that appeared in *The Mail on Sunday*, a British tabloid, after the 9/11 attacks.[22] But Osama was not living with his mother at the time of the alleged moral awakening. He was by then based in his father's household and was away most of the time at boarding school, so there may be doubts about how much his mother knew about what he was up to.

Bin Laden's mother has given a number of interviews to journalists, always insisting that it was exposure to the wicked West that caused Bin Laden to become an enemy of America and its allies. Her reliability as a character witness suffered a blow, however, when, in 2018, she told a journalist from *The Guardian* that Bin Laden "was a very good kid and he loved me so much." She complained that her life had been difficult because her son had been unable to see her for so long. She neglected to mention that the reason why mother and son could not meet was that her "good kid" was a wanted terrorist. Also misleadingly, but perhaps understandably, A'alia Ghanem described herself as being "in her mid-70s." She was born in 1934 and was, in fact, eighty-four at the time of the interview.[23]

The London conversion story has all the hallmarks of a life rewritten to suit a preferred narrative. The alleged moral awakening puts the young Osama in a sweet spot of jihadist narratives about the conversion experience. His alleged embrace of righteousness as a young teen is situated at that crucial point when boys assume the responsibility of adulthood and are considered ready to accept the armed *jihad* as an individual religious duty, *fard al-ayn*. Stories of questionable authenticity about revelations and suddenly hearing the call to *jihad* are routine in the autobiographies of jihadist warriors who put great value on sinner's conversion stories and divine interventions.[24]

In his journal, Bin Laden was also not entirely truthful about the intellectual influences of his teachers. He writes that the first time he thought about *jihad* was in high school and stressed that he came to the realization that *jihad* was required without outside guidance. Specifically, he claimed that the Muslim Brothers did not influence him. In fact, Lawrence Wright writes, a gym teacher at the *Al-Thagr* high school in Jeddah introduced Bin

Laden to the ideas associated with the Muslim Brotherhood when he was still a young teenager.[25] This disavowal of any influence from the Brotherhood suits the requirements of jihadist political correctness, according to which the Brotherhood is an ideological archenemy.

Was Bin Laden along on the trip to Sweden? Did he become "radicalized" on his trips to London as a teenager? Does it matter? Retrieving the original story from the archives, I found no mention of Osama's name in the local paper. But then, there is also no reason his name should be recorded. The only individual who was identified by name was Salem, the businessman in charge. Osama was one of the youngest and least significant members of the family group. By 2001, when the story broke about Bin Laden's masterminding of the attacks in New York and Washington D.C., it is possible the Swedish witnesses may have been too quick to say, yes, he was here. That the world's most wanted terrorists had come for a visit is a juicy story. The Swedes might also have had difficulty telling the young Saudis apart. The teenage males in the photo all have a strong family resemblance. The youth identified as Osama could have be a different brother.

I went looking for photographs. The clues are few but the teenager in the Swedish photo identified as Osama resembles a photograph taken two years later that was included in the Bin Laden family photo collection. This photo is published in a memoir his wife and one of his sons wrote of their lives with Bin Laden.[26] In that case, we know for sure this is a photo of Osama.

The date of the visit to Sweden also roughly corresponds with when he is known to have attended language school in the United Kingdom. Those clues make it plausible, at least, that Osama was in the photo from Sweden.

A Spanish classmate in the language course in London the same year as the one from Falun, took another picture of Osama, this one from 1971. It appeared in a Spanish paper in October 2001. The young man identified as Osama by his fellow student (she is in the picture too) is unmistakably the same as the youngster shown in the picture from Falun. In that picture, Osama and two of his older half-brothers stand with their arms around two smartly dressed Spanish girls in a park in Oxford. The girls were classmates in the language course. Thirty years later, one of the girls in the photo, gave the picture to the paper, *El Correo*.[27] (Readers can follow the reference and go to the newspaper's site, where the article is still available.) Other photos produced by the classmate showed Osama and his fellow students, including the Spanish girls, having a picnic, and Osama punting a boat on the Cherwell

in Oxford. All in all, it is probable that the photo of the Bin Laden siblings in Sweden does actually include Osama. It matters only because between those keen to depict Bin Laden as a freak from the Saudi Arabian desert and Bin Laden's own efforts to say he abhorred the West from a young age, it becomes important to point out that Bin Laden was far more "normal" for his age and his social class than is assumed most of the time.

The Spanish woman who provided the photos from Oxford requested anonymity, but the journalists who saw the photos verified her story. Notes scribbled on the back of her pictures from the time in the United Kingdom identified the people in the photos. Younger readers may find this peculiar. But in 1971, people took photos with cameras rather than cell phones. When the film was developed after the trip abroad, you wrote on the back to remind you of who was in the photo and where it was taken, and you then put the photos in albums. The owner of the photos, who is also in the photos with the young Bin Laden, reported that the fourteen-year old Osama did not seem put out by the immodest clothes of the young women. Nor was he particularly interested in politics or overly "religious." She volunteered also that Osama was not a fan of the hectic London scene, and that he appeared to be sad about his family affairs. Osama allegedly told fellow language students that he and his brothers had different mothers, and that his mother had been a "concubine."

Was the mother really a "concubine"? Bin Laden Sr. never married Osama's mother in a "proper" Koranic ceremony. Whatever the truth about the "concubine" claim, it is part of Saudi lore about why Bin Laden went "bad." In an interview with CNN in 2001, a Saudi journalist, Ali Abbas al-Ahmed, insisted that Osama Bin Laden's mother was never properly married to his father, repeating the claim twice for emphasis: "She was not a wife. She was not a wife."[28] It is hard to know what to make of this. Saudi story telling about Bin Laden often attempts to erase him from the fabric of "proper" Saudi society. It is evident that Bin Laden treated his mother respectfully, even lovingly, throughout his life, but his mother's status may have been a painful issue for him.

The family drama is relevant to the story of how Bin Laden became a world leader of a deadly terrorist organization. Recent research on the drivers of radicalization has identified family-related trauma as a risk factor.[29] This may range from lacking male role models at home to sudden shocks associated with divorce or the loss of a parent. Combine such background factors with personality factors that include a desire to "be somebody" or

"do something," and given a push from alternative father figures and peer groups, a pathway may open up leading to rebellion against family and society norms, and, in some cases, to extremist activism. Osama's home life was highly unusual but his marginalized status in the hyper-wealthy Bin Laden family figures and his evident desire to acquire "big man" status make him a typical candidate for a teenage rebellion against family and Saudi society. Add in his wealth and the status that gave him in the small world of the global *jihad*, Bin Laden had the intelligence (some, but not too much), the sufficiently narcissistic personality, the business acumen, and the belief system to become a leader in the movement.

Bin Laden married for the first time in 1974. He was still a teenager. The groom was seventeen and the bride fifteen. They were first cousins: the father of the bride was the brother of Osama's mother. Convention would have dictated that he marry a cousin on his father's side of the family but Osama may have been considered a marginal member of the clan and therefore did not warrant a marriage with a paternal cousin.

Bin Laden traveled widely after his marriage. It has been suggested that both before and after this marriage, Osama engaged in drinking, gambling, and womanizing while on regular visits with his half-brothers to Beirut and to Western cities.[30] Family accounts confirm Bin Laden's early and enduring love for sports cars, speeding, and fast horses. His first wife, Najwa, writes about an incident when the young couple was visiting the family in Latakia, the coastal Syrian city that was home to the mother's side of her husband's family. Bin Laden was stopped for speeding. He got the ticket fixed.[31]

The stories about debauchery may be false, and are probably at least overblown.[32] In any case, if Bin Laden was cavorting in Beirut, as the rumors would have it, his behavior would have been no different from that of his father and other young wealthy Saudi men at the time.[33] The stories may have been put about later to discredit Bin Laden but, if so, they misfired. A history of sinning would not have been damaging to Bin Laden's reputation. Sinning and moral awakening are conventional pivot points in jihadist autobiographies. Once the hero sees the light, and embraces the obligation to conduct *jihad*, the sins of the past are forgiven.

Bin Laden came of age as everything around him was rapidly changing. The Middle East was becoming newly rich and outward looking.[34] In the 1970s, great cultural and intellectual changes came even in Saudi Arabia, the most conservative society in the Middle East.[35] During the 1973 Arab-Israeli

War, Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an embargo against the United States and a number of other Western countries as a reprisal for their support of Israel. The OPEC cartel triggered booming oil prices, and there was a sudden and vast accumulation of oil revenues in the Gulf States. The Bin Laden family prospered. Like most wealthy families in the oil-rich Arab states, they aspired to Western education, shopping, and international travel. But, at the same time, new cracks appeared in the conservative kingdoms. The region was on the frontline during the tug of war between revolutionaries of Marxist and Islamist orientations. Readers wanting a first-hand account of the crosscurrents of money and politics in the 1970s may turn to Kai Bird's terrific account of the life and death of Robert Ames, a swashbuckling American spy in the Middle East, which provides a thrilling version of the free-wheeling Western lifestyles that soon would be challenged by Islamist revolutionaries.[36]

The turning point in Bin Laden's life came when he was exposed to Egyptian Islamist radicals in Jeddah. In 1976, he started studying business management at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah. Now a father of three, he also worked in the family construction company.

While studying in Jeddah, Bin Laden became a disciple of a Palestinian refugee, Abdullah Yusuf Azzam, the man known as "the father of the global *jihad*." Steve Coll, who interviewed Bin Laden's classmates and friends, writes that Bin Laden started to read Azzam's writings during his student days in Jeddah. He was also studying other key Islamist revolutionary texts, including books by Sayyid Qutb, and by Qutb's brother, Muhammad Qutb, who was also one of Bin Laden's teachers. Sayyid Qutb is a foundational figure in Islamist political thought and his ideas influenced the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. He was executed in 1966 in Egypt during a crackdown on the Brotherhood.

Bin Laden was also reading the works of the thirteenth-century warrior-theologian Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), a legendary figure in jihadist history writing and political theory. Bin Laden's later proclamations and sermons are full of references to Ibn Taymiyyah.[37] Ibn Taymiyyah's writings and personal biography of itinerant opposition to the Muslim rulers of the time suit the jihadists. He was imprisoned on account of his calls for *jihad* against the Mongol empire, which was held to be responsible for the conquest of Muslim territory in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Mongols converted to Islam and made Islam the state religion in most of the empire, but they were not regarded as true Muslims by Arab Muslims. Jihadism

works on the bases of parallel thinking and historical analogies. Ibn Taymiyyah's account of the Mughal occupation of the true Muslim heartland is now an analogous narrative device used by the jihadists—and by Bin Laden—to justify the call for armed *jihad* against devious Muslim "tyrants" and the West.

Azzam, Bin Laden's mentor, was a towering figure in the jihadist movement. In the mid-1970s, he was expelled from Jordan, where he had been teaching, and moved to Saudi Arabia. He began his political career in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) but did not follow the organization's shift in the early 1970s towards Marxist liberation theory and its embrace by the communist bloc. Azzam instead went to the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, graduating with a Ph.D. in Koranic studies. An itinerant radical, he ended up in Saudi Arabia, which at that time was welcoming Muslim Brotherhood figures. Today, the jihadist movement venerates Azzam for his intellectual contribution and also for his role as a military commander in Afghanistan.

It is probable that Azzam and Bin Laden first met in Jeddah. What is known for sure is that in 1979 Bin Laden met Azzam in the United States. Najwa writes that she recognized Azzam from pictures as the man her husband met with during their visit.[38] Azzam was touring American mosques raising money for the *jihad* against the communists in Afghanistan. Bin Laden's wife, Najwa, and the children stayed with acquaintances in Indiana during the trip to the United States, which may have been undertaken to seek medical treatment for a child.[39] The wives of Azzam and Bin Laden both reported that their husbands visited each other frequently in the early 1980s, in Jeddah and in Amman, Jordan, where Azzam's family remained.[40] Bin Laden had been going to Pakistan regularly since 1979 to bring money raised in Saudi Arabia to the Afghan fighters.

The year 1979 was fateful in the Middle East. In Iran, the Shah was deposed, and the country declared an Islamic Republic led by the Shia religious cadre. In November, militant students took over the American embassy in Teheran and held fifty-two Americans hostage for fourteen months. The confrontation between Sunni and Shia Islamism with which we are now familiar was muted then. Radical Sunni groups admired the Iranian revolutionaries. Also in November, extremist Islamist militants took over the Grand Mosque in Mecca and called for the overthrow of the Saudi ruling family. The siege set off bloody fighting inside the most holy mosque which the Ka'aba, the most sacred site in Islam. In the

crackdown that followed in Saudi Arabia, Bin Laden's mentor, Azzam, was dismissed from the university.

In December 1979, the Soviet Union sent troops into Afghanistan to provide protection for the communist-dominated government.[41] The occupation was prompted by the imminent collapse of a "people's front" government in Afghanistan. In 1978, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, a left-wing secular party had taken power in a coup, carried out land reforms, and banned forced marriages. A second coup brought a more Soviet-oriented faction into power, provoking uprisings in the countryside. Within weeks of the communist coup, Bin Laden dropped out of university to work for a charity that supported Arabs who were fighting with Afghan guerillas. He traveled to Pakistan, where he had contacts with conservative religious groups and set up an office with the assistance of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, the Pakistani branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.[42] (This is another reason why Bin Laden's protestations in his journal that he was not influenced by the Brotherhood ring false: a Brotherhood organization gave him his first job in the movement.)

In 1980, Bin Laden was twenty-three. He was making regular visits to London. Atwan reports that, in the early 1980s, Osama attended the Regent's Park Mosque in London several times and even delivered sermons there.[43] The mosque was built in the late 1970s with money from the Saudi royal family. The close ties between the Bin Laden family and the royal family would have opened doors for the young Osama and it is credible that the young man would have been allowed to speak at the mosque because of his family and because of what he was doing for the fight against the infidel communists in Afghanistan. The visits to London and the Regent's Park Mosque occurred after Bin Laden began to bankroll Azzam and embarked on what would be his life's work: working for the *jihad*.

In the early 1980s, Bin Laden's principal job was to ferry money from rich Saudis via Pakistani contacts to the Afghan fighters. The Bin Laden family, like many other rich Saudis, directed their obligatory charity tithe, *zakat*, to the Afghan cause. So Bin Laden was not yet departing from the approved path of a Saudi patron of Islamist causes.

He was not the precocious Salafi jihadist he later liked to present as his official biography. His personal radicalization trajectory was subject to the push and pull variables that are often present when someone is drawn into political activism and extremism. His father was absent in his life, and he

met father figures who took it upon themselves to tutor the young rich man. A teacher triggered a civic awakening when he was a young teen and opened his mind to the Muslim problem. Later, his exposure to radical Islamists gave him direction and pointed the way to action. As a seventeen-year-old university student, he met people with contacts to an international movement. He came together with peers in a study group of students reading illicit texts, and met charismatic revolutionaries who became his tutors. He may have been engaged, on the margins, in a protest movement against the Saudi rulers and the Saudi state that resulted in a siege by the rebels of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in November and December 1979.

As an activist, Bin Laden was able to carve out a role for himself that was not circumscribed by tradition and was not handicapped by his marginalized place in the family. Becoming an activist promised many rewards: status, travel, and opportunity to hang out with famous men. And, clearly, he had drive, business know-how, and charisma. After his introduction to the international *jihad*, in the course of the next decade Bin Laden evolved into a global terrorist leader.

Pakistan

In 1983, Bin Laden joined with Azzam, his mentor from his university days, to establish *Maktab Khadamāt al-Mujāhidīn al-'Arab* (MAK), known in English as the Afghan Services Bureau of the *Mujahideen*, in Peshawar. The bureau funneled money and volunteers from Arab countries to the fighters in Afghanistan. Working with Azzam, Bin Laden also helped to internationalize the conflict in Afghanistan by setting up charities and recruiting volunteers in Muslim countries, the United States and Europe.[44]

On their travels to recruit and raise money for the struggle, the two men spread the word about the obligation incumbent on Muslims to join the armed struggle in defense of Muslim lands against the unbelievers. The struggle against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan came first, but Azzam left no doubt about the need to continue the *jihad* after victory over the communists. In 1986, Bin Laden moved to Peshawar, taking his family with him. From that point on he would maintain a base there. He traveled back and forth between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, working to raise money from wealthy Saudi and Gulf state donors, who, flush with revenue from oil, were his chief benefactors.

Around the same time, Bin Laden started financing a training camp in Afghanistan for Arab volunteers fighting in Afghanistan, effectively creating his own military force. He wanted to establish an independent Arab military brigade under his control. In 1986, he set up his first training camp in Afghanistan to train Arab volunteers in guerilla fighting techniques and to provide ideological instruction. Located in a mountain range in the Paktia Province in Eastern Afghanistan, bordering the tribal areas in North Waziristan under the control of Pakistan, it was named *Mujahideen al-Masada*, the "Lion's Den." Bin Laden brought in heavy equipment from his family firm in Saudi Arabia to build the camp and to dig tunnels into the mountainsides.

The Bin Laden myth relies heavily on his alleged heroism in armed combat against the Soviet troops. But Bin Laden was living in Pakistan most of the time during the Afghan uprising against the Soviet-backed regime and is known to have engaged in combat only on a couple of occasions. The myth of Bin Laden as a warrior is based on the story of the "Battle of Jaji." The name was taken from the mountain range where the events took place. In April 1987, Bin Laden led an assault against a nearby Afghan government post. Poorly planned, the expedition was a fiasco.[45] Bin Laden and his men were forced to withdraw. Their base was then attacked by a combination of Soviet airborne troops, Afghan troops, and local tribal fighter groups siding with the government. Outgunned and outnumbered by the attackers, the Arab *mujahideen* suffered heavy losses in the fighting and during a three-week long siege that followed. Bin Laden himself was wounded in the foot.

Legend has it that Bin Laden was so trusting of victory with Allah on his side that he fell asleep during intense battle and woke up to see the Russians closing in, about to capture him. Then a miracle happened. The Russian troops suddenly, inexplicably, turned back, and Bin Laden and his men were saved. The story was subsequently retold many times in Al Qaeda propaganda and by Bin Laden himself. Tales pivoting on miracles need not have a factual basis but Lawrence Wright speculated that Bin Laden, who allegedly suffered from low blood pressure, may have fainted.[46] More likely the story was manufactured to suit the jihadists' taste for miracles. Some of the less flattering biographies published in recent years by his contemporaries allege that Bin Laden never shot a gun outside the practice range.

What is known is that the Soviet forces withdrew after three weeks of fighting, and the *mujahideen* declared victory. Participants who later fell out with Bin Laden have described the skirmish as frivolous and an operational

disaster. Fifty of Bin Laden's small group of Afghan Arabs were killed, as were many more Afghan *mujahideen* who were deployed to extract Bin Laden and his men.[47] Failure or success, the battle has played an outsize role in jihadist mythology. The survivors of the men who fought there became Bin Laden's most trusted associates and helped form Al Qaeda.

Global *Jihad*, Inc.

Al Qaeda was founded in August 1988 in the course of several meetings in Bin Laden's house in Peshawar, Pakistan. The founding meetings produced a set of bylaws for the new organization and an organizational chart of a strictly hierarchical corporation on the model of a large firm, or, in some ways, resembling an Arab state bureaucracy. The chart was made to accommodate growth with the number of offices and bosses put on paper exceeding the small cadre of men actually present in that house.

We know this from documents discovered in 2002 in Bosnia during a police raid of the head office in Sarajevo of one of Bin Laden's charities, the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF).[48] The Sarajevo office was an affiliate of several U.S.-based offices for a charity created by a merger of a foundation created by a Saudi millionaire, Adel Bin Abdul-Jalil Batterjee, and a second foundation set up by Mohammad Jamal Khalifa. The discovery in Sarajevo led to arrests in the United States in what became the largest post-9/11 terrorism financing prosecution.[49]

The Sarajevo archive included copies of handwritten notes from the founding meeting in Peshawar, filed together with letters that documented how Bin Laden used funds raised through the registered charity to pay for weapons, clothing, and travel for the foreign volunteer jihadists who went to fight first in Afghanistan and then Chechnya and later Bosnia. (BIF was incorporated as a tax-exempt nonprofit organization in the State of Illinois on March 30, 1992. It was banned by the U.N. Security Council and the U.S. Treasury in November 2002.)

The files, saved in a folder labeled "Tareekh Osama" (the history of Osama), had been scanned, labeled, and stored on a digital compact disc. Their method of preservation suggests a self-conscious concern with the historical value of the files and the legacy. Many of the documents are now publicly available from the Counter Terrorism Center at West Point's Harmony Project.[50]

Bin Laden's personal assistant, a U.S. citizen of Syrian background, Mohammed Loay Bayazid (alias "Abu Rida"), was responsible for the notetaking at the founding meetings. His notes are remarkably pedestrian and yet revelatory. Names of attendees were taken. Opening the meeting, Bin Laden reviewed all that the Arabs had done for the Afghan *mujahideen*: raising money from the Saudis; supporting the struggle; restoring the *mujahideen* to power. There were disagreements with the Taliban about the deployment of the Arab fighters who had been fighting alongside the Afghans. The Taliban were not welcoming of the Arabs. The Taliban would not give the Arabs good weapons and would not let them fight in the front ranks. The list of complaints lodged by Bin Laden was long. The notes taken at the meeting refer to "the darkest of circumstances" and refer to a crisis among the Afghan Arabs and to discontent in the ranks.[51] There were also complaints about "mismanagement and bad treatment" in *Maktab al-Khadamat*, the Services Bureau jointly created by Bin Laden and Azzam. Therefore, there was a need to establish a vanguard for the *jihad*. This would be Al Qaeda.

The meeting was a small affair. Fifteen "brothers" were listed as attending. Among them was Ayman al-Zawahiri, who after Bin Laden's death took over as the emir of Al Qaeda. Egyptians represented the largest contingent at the meetings; all of them were exiled veterans from two Egyptian terrorist groups.

Abdullah Yusuf Azzam was also there, together with one of his sons. Azzam and his son were killed in a car bombing a year after the founding. Two men, also Egyptians, who became Bin Laden's chief military operations commanders, were there, too: Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri and Muhammed Atef, known as Abu Hafs. Al-Banshiri was an Egyptian and close to Bin Laden. He drowned accidentally in a boat accident on Lake Victoria in 1996. Atef died in a U.S. airstrike near Kabul in November 2001.

Present was also Mamdouh Mahmud Salim, a Sudanese man known as Abu Hajer. He was trained as an engineer but served dual roles as a producer of religious rulings authorizing attacks and as a business agent for Bin Laden.[52] Among other things, Salim negotiated on Bin Laden's behalf with the Sudanese about the relocation to Sudan in 1991 and later negotiated on Bin Laden's behalf to purchase chemical weapons from Iran (which did not happen).[53] Salim was arrested in Germany in 1998 and extradited to stand trial in the United States on charges related to the bombing of the U.S. embassies in East Africa in 1998. He is serving a lifetime sentence in a high security prison in Colorado.

A number of Americans were also present. Bin Laden's personal assistant, Bayazid, was one. Bayazid has never been arrested and is now thought to live in Bosnia. (The assumption is that he collaborated with American investigators after the 9/11 attacks.) Wadih el-Hage, an Egyptian-American, was also present at the founding meeting. He moved to the United States in 1978 to study at University of Louisiana. After moving into Bin Laden's orbit as a volunteer in Afghanistan, he worked for Bin Laden on many projects, including the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the planning of the 1998 bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. He is currently serving multiple life sentences in a high security prison in the United States.[54]

Enaam Arnaout, a Syrian-born U.S. citizen, also present, became a money manager for Bin Laden, helping him run his illicit charities in the United States. Arnaout was arrested after the 9/11 attacks and pleaded guilty to racketeering in 2003. He admitted to racketeering charges (a mafia era charge) and to misleading donors about the ultimate uses of funds.[55] The prosecution faced problems on multiple fronts. The evidence from Bosnia, while highly interesting to researchers and analysts, did not convince the court that Arnaout was a supporter of Al Qaeda.

In the end, the case hinged on the appropriation of an ambulance and supplies for non-humanitarian purposes, a fraction of the overall funds raised by the foundation over the years. Arnaout was given a ten-year sentence on the racketeering charges after he pled guilty to misleading donors to BIF by not telling them that funds would be used to provide tents and clothing for fighters in Chechnya, Bosnia, and Afghanistan rather than orphans and widows. The case was controversial among legal activists who painted it as an instance of overzealous persecution inspired by the government's frenzied retribution against all things Muslim in the aftermath of 9/11. Arnaout's lawyers contested the verdict through many appeals but did not gain much ground either.

In July 2010, Arnaout was released from prison to a halfway house and was reported to have started working as a car salesman during a three-year supervised probation period. In 2012, he received permission from the court probation services to fly to Egypt to visit relatives. (He was denied entry into Saudi Arabia, where his family was living.) On his return, he was denied entry to the United States on the grounds that he was on the no-fly list.[56] In 2014, the United States' government had his citizenship revoked on the grounds that he perjured himself by failing to declare his affiliation with Bin

Laden, Al Qaeda, and the Taliban on his naturalization application in 1994 and on grounds of prior crimes—the racketeering and misrepresentation that Arnaout admitted to in his plea agreement.

Wael Hamza Julaidan, a Saudi who helped Azzam and Bin Laden set up the Afghan Services Bureau for the traveling Arab volunteers for Afghanistan and the recruiting posts in the United States, was also at that meeting in 1988. Although he did not become a U.S. citizen, Julaidan lived in Arizona in the 1980s where he founded the Tucson Islamic Center. The center became an outpost for the recruitment of volunteers to fight in Afghanistan and later played a role in supporting the Brooklyn cell that carried out the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Years later, suspicions arose that one of the 9/11 hijackers, Hani Hanjour, was radicalized through his contacts in Tucson while he was a student there in the 1990s.

In 2002, the U.S. Treasury Department listed Julaidan as an international financier of terrorism. The designation freezes all bank accounts belonging to the individual and prohibits anyone from engaging in international financial transactions with the designated person and associated businesses.[57] However, he was never prosecuted. A multimillionaire, he is presumed to be living in Saudi Arabia.

Some of the founding members remained loyal until death. Others did not. Sayyed Imam al-Sharif, who is better known as "Dr. Fadl," was there. Al-Zawahiri and Dr. Fadl are both trained medical doctors, and both fled Egypt after the assassination of Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian president, in 1981. Dr. Fadl was, at the time, the emir-in-exile of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, al-Zawahiri's boss. A theoretician of *jihad*, he wrote a 1,000-page long tome endorsing the call for *jihad* that became obligatory reading for recruits in the training camps in Afghanistan. Fadl went on to become a member of Al Qaeda's *shura*, the governing council of religious scholars that advises on the religious permissibility of terrorist attacks, but he eventually fell out with Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Dr. Fadl's defection came in 2006, when he started lecturing to imprisoned extremists in Egypt about the legal restrictions of the use of violence in Koranic jurisprudence and the wrongs of jihadism.[58] He now lives in Egypt.

A Sudanese militant, Jamal Ahmed al-Fadl (not related to "Dr. Fadl" mentioned above) who was also present at the first meeting, fell out with Bin Laden in the 1990s on matters of perceived racism and pay inequity, and became a witness for the prosecution of the Bin Laden and his associates.

Throughout the 1990s, the men who worked for Bin Laden traveled the world like business executives representing a global corporation. Bin Laden started small and suffered multiple setbacks but by the close of the decade his enterprise might fittingly have been called Global *Jihad*, Inc.[59]

The bylaws and the notes from the founding meeting found in Sarajevo provide a clear statement of the organization's purpose and a roadmap for how to accomplish the goals. Under general policies, the first point was: "Complete commitment to the governing rules and controls of Shari'a in all the beliefs and actions and according to the book [the Koran, author's comment] and *Sunna* as well as per the interpretation of the nation's scholars who serve in this domain." The means were similarly laid out, point for point: "(i.) To promote *jihad* awareness in the Islamic world," and (ii.) To prepare and equip the cadres for the Islamic world through trainings and by participating in actual combat."

In translations of the founding documents the name of the organization is sometimes transliterated as *al-Qa'ida*, Arabic for "the Base" or "the Foundation." This name—which is here given in the standard English transliteration—carried over from Bin Laden's first training camp in Afghanistan which was called *al-Qa'ida al-'Askariyya*, or "the military base." The training camps were rented spaces or camps lent to Bin Laden by Afghan militias. While the name of Bin Laden's organization is now iconic, it was one aspect of the plans to which Bin Laden appears to have given little thought.

The anonymous U.S. government translator of the archived documents added a perspicacious description of the overall impression made by the documents. I cannot do any better than the translator and therefore cite the comment at length: "This document is a lengthy bureaucratic document that outlines the goals of *al-Qa`ida*, organizational procedures, bylaws, position descriptions, benefits, and allowances. The goals *al-Qa`ida* outlined in the document include: spreading *jihad*, preparing and training qualified Muslim personnel for *jihad*, supporting local jihadi movements around the world, and coordinating jihadi movements so as to create a united global *jihad* movement. The document reveals the highly centralized and controlling nature of the organization, and the extent to which it has embraced modern management practices while maintaining fidelity to its religious vision."[60]

State bureaucracy or not, another way of looking at the organization chart is that, from the beginning, Al Qaeda was intended as the vanguard for the revolution and modeled on a clandestine Leninist party with a politburo

at the top and a secretary general calling the shots. The latter, of course, was Bin Laden's position.[61]

Al Qaeda's ultimate goal was laid out: to establish an Islamic nation spanning the globe. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to build support for a particular understanding of "*jihad*" (the brand); to recruit and train a jihadist cadre (investment and professionalization); and to develop a global outreach strategy. The powers of various committees were defined, and an organizational template sketched out. General policies were enumerated as bullet points. The new Islamic nation would be ruled by religious law. Compromise was not allowed and the only means would be the armed struggle. Point 3 of document specified, "Our agenda is that of war and we shall not be preoccupied with humanitarian or similar matters." Al Qaeda would become the military and political vanguard for the global struggle, preparing, equipping, training, and coordinating the armed and educated cadre of the jihadist movement. Point 4 says, "We shall not agree with them [the tyrants of the world] on half-solutions and there is no way to negotiate with them or appease them."

Bayazid's notes listed the membership requirements for the vanguard, with heavy emphasis on obedience, good references and decent manners. Recruitment had already begun. "Commandant Abu Ubaida arrived to inform [me] of the existence of thirty brothers in Al Qaeda meeting the requirements – Thank God." The bearer of the good news was Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri, an Egyptian, who had fought with Bin Laden at the "Battle of Jaji." The small number of qualified "brothers" suggests the scale of Bin Laden's operations at this time. The Soviet Union was brought to its knees and the hated irreligious communist government was about to collapse. The *mujahideen* were victorious. And yet the notes convey a sense of defeat and disarray.[62] For all of the bombast, the new Al Qaeda was a rescue operation.

Bin Laden wanted the Arab fighters to form a brigade or a legion of fighters and become a "vanguard" for the international *jihad*, a sort of rapid deployment force that would travel to hotspots and help out the locals. Azzam and some of the other senior leaders in the Arab Afghan contingent wanted the Arab fighters to blend in with the Afghans, and to focus on building the new Islamic state in Afghanistan. Once that was accomplished, the vanguard should go to Palestine and take on Israel. For his part, al-Zawahiri wanted to focus on Egypt.

The disagreements reflected a deeper strategic schism among the Afghan Arabs. Azzam was the intellectual heir to Sayyid Qutb and a transformative

thinker on the jihadist theory of just war. Azzam introduced the concept of "global *jihad*" and formulated the justification for the existence of "an individual obligation" to take up arms to defend the Muslim nation. Conducting the armed *jihad*, he claimed, was *fard al-ayn*, an individual and "compulsory" duty for every able-bodied Muslim, who was bound to fight for the "honor of every Muslim woman that is being violated in Afghanistan and [...] for every drop of Muslim blood that is being shed unjustly." Azzam's writings are banned in Muslim countries but they remain widely available online on jihadist websites.[63] According to religious law, *fard al-ayn* refers to the obligations that must be performed by each individual Muslim, such as daily prayers, giving charity, observing dietary rules, fasting, and if able, to make pilgrimage (*hajj*) at least once in an individual's life time. But even within a consensual understanding of the theory of "the individual obligation," there was room for disagreement.

But theory and principles do not dictate the tactics of where and when to fight the armed *jihad*. Azzam and many like-minded jihadist nationalists thought the Egyptian terrorist groups and Bin Laden went too far by denouncing Muslim governments as apostates. Their strategy would sow strife—*fitna*—among Muslims. Israel, meanwhile, was a religiously "safe" target. The arguments were formulated theoretically but it was evident that the men had different national origins and that they had different priorities. Bin Laden and his Egyptian associates wanted to take the battle to Saudi Arabia and to Egypt, and raise an army of fighters that would deploy anywhere when opportunity arose. Azzam wanted to redirect the troops against Israel.

When, a year later, Azzam died in a car bombing in Peshawar, Bin Laden blamed the murder on Israeli agents. The 9/11 Commission Report blamed the Egyptians and al-Zawahiri. Events following Azzam's death lent support to the theory at al-Zawahiri was behind the assassination.[64] With Azzam out of the way, al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden moved quickly to control the charities, offices and centers in Europe and North America that had belonged to Azzam's network.

Bin Laden's vanguard organization was a coalition of defeated and exiled Egyptians, Saudis, a handful of Sudanese men, and a few other nationalities.[65] With the question of where to go next unresolved, the participants scattered. The Egyptians were on the wanted list on account of earlier political activities, and they could not go home. Some of the old guard present at the founding meeting stayed in Afghanistan to maintain Bin Laden's bases there.

Others found their way to Europe. A few became international nomads. Traveling under multiple identities, al-Zawahiri went on a lecturing tour that took him to Western Europe and the United States. At one point he ended up in a Russian prison.

Next stop, Sudan

In 1989, Bin Laden went home to Saudi Arabia to receive his share of his father's company. The payout to the heirs of Bin Laden Sr. was a result of a major restructuring of the Bin Laden Group following the untimely death of the eldest heir, Salem, in a flight accident in Texas. Estimates of the payout to Bin Laden from the consolidation of the family firm vary, but most sources quote a one-time payout of about 20 million dollars (equivalent to about 40 million dollars today).[66] The distribution was paid out in a mix of cash and shares. Bin Laden also received annual allowances and dividends. The funds were paid out gradually between 1989 and 1993. He also started working in the firm, the Bin Laden Group. But politics got in the way of his reintegration into Saudi society. Bin Laden returned home a hero and used his fame to establish a platform for himself. As a result, his relationship with the Saudi royal family quickly deteriorated.

Bin Laden was now rich, far richer personally than any other militant in the narrow jihadist circles. And yet, his personal fortune did not cover all of the expenses associated with his clandestine enterprise. He had to raise money to sustain the organization. If not for another war, Bin Laden's Al Qaeda might never have gotten off the ground. On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded and annexed Kuwait in a brief two-day military campaign. The invasion was seen as a first step in plans concocted by Saddam Hussein to gain control over Kuwait's oil wells and to give him a springboard for an attack on Saudi Arabia. Four days later, U.S. forces arrived in Saudi Arabia in preparation for a counteroffensive against Saddam's forces, and what would become the first Gulf War. In January 1991, U.S. troops launched an attack on the Iraqi forces in Kuwait, and followed up by invading Iraq.[67]

Bin Laden then made a fantastical proposal to the royal family. He offered his assistance and his loyal fighters on the condition that the kingdom would not allow the infidel troops to set foot on sacred Muslim lands. His offer was not accepted.[68]

In an interview with the *New York Times* conducted after the 9/11 attacks, Prince Sultan Bin Abdelaziz al-Saud, the Saudi defense minister, recounted a meeting he had with Bin Laden at the time. Bin Laden arrived with maps and diagrams, and offered to lead the fight against the Shia unbelievers who were occupying Kuwait. He would personally command the troops and put 100,000 of his *mujahideen* into the battle if the royals would refrain from letting the United States into the country to beat back Saddam Hussein's troops. Bin Laden had perhaps a thousand fighters under his control at the time. Some estimates have put his fighting forces in the hundreds only.[69] "We will fight him with faith," Bin Laden allegedly replied when the minister noted that the Iraqis had fielded 4,000 tanks and that there were no caves or mountains in which to hide.

The proposal was wildly unrealistic. Bin Laden may have believed that the fight against the Iraqi regime would inspire thousands of volunteers and become a replay of the battle against the communists in Afghanistan. The Iraqi regime was controlled by the Baath Party, which subscribed to a secular pseudo-socialist ideology. He would have seen the war against Saddam Hussein's regime as an opportunity to build the army of the righteous Sunni holy warriors that was Al Qaeda's mission. It was a stupendous miscalculation.

After being turned down, Bin Laden then criticized the royal family for "desecrating" the holiest place in Islam by allowing the build-up of U.S. bases in Saudi Arabia.[70] He was placed under house arrest and then, in April, 1991, given a restricted passport and allowed to leave Saudi Arabia. He first went back to Pakistan, where he had maintained a residence. However, he was no longer welcome. Pakistan had turned against the Arab militants and closed their offices. Later that year, Bin Laden moved to Sudan.

The London office

In 1993, the British journalist Robert Fisk met with Bin Laden in Sudan. He published an interview afterwards in *The Independent* under the headline: "Anti-Soviet Warrior puts his army on the road to peace." It was a puff piece. Fisk described Bin Laden as a "shy man" and a "Saudi entrepreneur," who sat "in his gold-fringed robe, guarded by the loyal Arab *mujahedin*" and looking "every inch the mountain warrior of *mujahedin* legend." Fresh from his victory over Russia, according to Fisk, Bin Laden was engaged in the

peaceful development of a new highway from Khartoum to the ocean port, opening a new supply route to the capital city.

Fisk did ask Bin Laden whether he supported training camps for militant jihadists, but he accepted Bin Laden's claim that he was a "construction engineer and an agriculturalist" with no time for such projects. Fisk also passed on the myth, already mentioned, about Bin Laden's combat experience in the war against the infidel communists, divine intervention included:

> Once I was only 30 meters from the Russians and they were trying to capture me. I was under bombardment but I was so peaceful in my heart that I fell asleep. This experience has been written about in our earliest books. I saw a 120mm mortar shell land in front of me, but it did not blow up. Four more bombs were dropped from a Russian plane on our headquarters but they did not explode. We beat the Soviet Union. The Russians fled.[71]

Based in Khartoum, Bin Laden's London office became his international bureau. In faxes sent from Sudan to his office in London and passed on to a London-based Arabic-language newspaper, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, Bin Laden railed against imperialists and the Saudi regime.

On March 5, 1994, King Fahd personally revoked Bin Laden's Saudi citizenship, and sent an emissary to the Sudan to demand his passport.[72] Bin Laden's response arrived by FAX from Sudan to the London office and was published as a letter to the editor in the newspaper that had published his other missives. His megalomania once again on display, Bin Laden issued a "religious ruling" that he should be allowed to return to Saudi Arabia, restored to the good graces of the ruling family, given back his money, and granted restitution for his losses by the royal family. He did not stop there. The letter accused the royal family of being in cahoots with communists, socialists, and the United Nations.

Headline: Saudi Arabia Supports the Communists in Yemen

> Date: 27-12-1414 (07 June 1994)
>
> The Yemeni communists have enslaved the Yemeni people, spreading apostasy and corruption. Infidel forces and their agents in the region led a conspiracy to re-establish two Yemeni states to promote conflict between them, Prince Sultan led a special committee that funneled support to the Yemeni Socialist Party. King Fahd is known to have anti-Islamic policies such as opposing Islamic awakening that would expose the artificiality of his rule; supporting anti-Islamic regimes such as the USSR, Algeria, Syria, and Christian groups in Sudan. Furthermore, he supported United Nations resolutions that cost Muslim lives in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lebanon, and

> Kashmir, and which support the Jews in Palestine, Muslims now realize that the U.N. is an instrument in the hands of the Jews and Crusaders [...].[73]

The accusations that the Saudi royal family was in cahoots with socialists, communists, and handing the Muslim faithful over to the enemy by engaging with the United Nations make no sense outside the jihadists' belief system. When his letter was published, the deadly consequences of Bin Laden's hatred of the United Nations were not yet known.

The reference in the letter to the "Islamic Awakening" is now obscure. The movement, which is also known as the *Sahwa* movement, was comprised of Salafist religious dissidents. Many of them were members of the Muslim Brotherhood living in exile in Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden's engagement with leading figures in the movement dated back to his days at university in Jeddah.[74] In the 1950s and 1960s, and well into the 1970s, the Saudi regime was hospitable to the Salafist purists but this changed in 1979, after a group of anti-monarchist Salafist dissidents laid siege to the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Islam's holiest site, and took control of the mosque for fifteen days. Conflict with the Salafist fundamentalists flared up again in 1991, when Salafist clerics turned against the House of Saud on the question of support from the United States in the war against Iraq.

Bin Laden was adept at keeping the true reach of his organization and his ambitions under cover. He was already heavily invested in funding global terrorism by the time of the angry faxes sent to London. His outward appearance of being simply a Saudi dissident obscured the fact that he was already deeply engaged in working to build a globalized terrorist network and plotting terrorist strikes internationally. He was raising money, legally and illegally, developing a global network of operatives, and making connections with terrorist groups, including the Iran-sponsored Hezbollah. He had supported terrorist groups in North Africa and the Horn of Africa since 1992. Afghan Arabs returning from Afghanistan with the support of Bin Laden started carrying out attacks in Yemen in 1992.[75] Plans had already been hatched to attack Western targets in Africa and business agents dispatched to set up the required infrastructure.

In June 1995, members of al-Zawahiri's organization, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, attacked the motorcade of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa, when Mubarak was attending a summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United States combined forces to put pressure on Bin Laden's Sudanese hosts to stop his activities and Sudan was placed under a U.N. sanctioned embargo.

Finally, in 1996, the mercurial Sudanese ruler threw Bin Laden and his Egyptian associates out of the country. The precise circumstances of Bin Laden's expulsion are murky, but Bin Laden was allowed to fly out his large family and many employees, and move back to Afghanistan. He came as the guest of the Taliban and on the invitation of Mullah Omar, the leader of the newly declared Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Bin Laden started to rebuild the training camps in Afghanistan and began to recruit a cadre of first-generation immigrants who had obtained American or European passports. And in January 1996, the CIA created the Bin Laden Issue Station, a special unit dedicated to tracking his activities.

Back to Afghanistan

Following Bin Laden's family affairs is not easy. He is reported to have married five, or maybe six times, and to have had twenty-four children. One child is said to have died at birth.

In her joint, ghostwritten, autobiography with one of the sons, Omar, who in adult life turned against Bin Laden, Najwa, Bin Laden's first wife, describes the circumstances when she gave birth to their fourth son in 1981. She writes that, thankfully, Bin Laden returned from his business in Pakistan to take her to the hospital for the birth:

> My husband was a man on a mission; he settled me in his automobile and raced to Bukshan Hospital, driving through Jeddah neighborhoods at such speeds that familiar structures appeared as a blur. Despite the intensity of the labor pains racking my body, I felt myself the luckiest woman in the world.[76]

Najwa went on to have eleven children with Bin Laden.

In 1983, some years into his life as a professional jihadist, Bin Laden took a second wife, Khadijah Sharif. Her family claimed a direct line of descent from the Prophet, and she was herself a namesake of Muhammad's first wife, Khadijah. And like the Prophet's wife, this Khadijah was significantly older than her husband.[77]

In 1985, apparently, Najwa brokered the marriage between Bin Laden and his third wife, Khairiah Sabar, who stayed with Bin Laden to the end of his life in 2011. Her son with Bin Laden, Hamza, seems to have been groomed to become Bin Laden's heir. Shiham Sabar, a fourth wife (not

related to Khairiah), married Bin Laden in 1987. She also stayed with him to the end in Abbottabad.

Life in Sudan did not suit Khadijah Sharif, the second wife. She left Bin Laden in 1990 to return to her native Saudi Arabia. Bin Laden apparently added another wife during the years in Sudan after Khadijah left but the marriage lasted so briefly that it has generally not been counted. In 1999 or 2000, Bin Laden married Amal al-Sadah, his youngest wife. A teenager at the time of the marriage, her arrival set off frictions in the cloistered household.[78] She too was with him in Abbottabad when he was killed.

Up until the move back to Afghanistan in 1996, Bin Laden had lived in comfortable houses with air conditioning. There was house help for the wives. Najwa described the family fleeing Sudan in 1996 in secret, fearful of assassins and taking refuge on a mountainside in Afghanistan where they led a life of extreme deprivation, with insufficient food and without electricity.[79] Ideological strictures made life even tougher. Bin Laden had not previously run his family in this fashion so it may be assumed he wanted to please his hosts, the strict Talibani rulers. The children were denied toys and made to grow their own vegetables. Even when they eventually moved to a town, the wives were not allowed to watch TV or to use refrigerators or air conditioning. Western clothing was prohibited. But when Bin Laden wanted news of the world, he relied on the BBC or CNN.

Najwa left Bin Laden in Afghanistan shortly before the 9/11 strikes in September 2001. Bin Laden did not allow her to take their young children with her. The timing could not have been a coincidence but no explanation has been forthcoming. Al Qaeda's bases in Afghanistan were humming with rumors of a forthcoming big event, described by the inner circle as the "planes project." Even as hapless new volunteers kept arriving from Europe and North America during the summer months of 2001, members of the top echelon in Al Qaeda were sending their families away.[80] Bin Laden's other wives were also given an opportunity to leave, but they stayed with him. After his death Amal was returned to her native Yemen, and the Pakistani authorities deported Khairiah and Shiham to Saudi Arabia in 2012.

Bin Laden, the TV celebrity

Only in retrospect has it become apparent how easily Bin Laden manipulated Western media coverage to suit his purposes. Back in Afghanistan and

engaging in a long-distance campaign against the West, he started to attend to his public image. And now, for the first time, he publicly claimed to be conducting a terrorist campaign against the United States.

Contacts were made with Western journalists through Bin Laden's London office. They were invited to visit with Bin Laden in Afghanistan. Abdel Bari Atwan interviewed Bin Laden shortly after the release of the manifesto declaring war against the Americans. Atwan's interview was published in November 1996. Also in 1996, Bin Laden allowed himself to be interviewed by Gwynne Roberts, an independent British journalist. Fisk was invited back in 1997. (Bin Laden clearly liked the first interview.) In March 1997, Peter Arnett from CNN was granted an on-camera interview but was not permitted to ask follow-up questions and had to use cameras provided by Bin Laden. The interview that resulted can still be seen on YouTube. Peter Bergen was part of this CNN party. He is today a commentator for CNN and has written highly regarded books about Al Qaeda and Bin Laden. The CNN team also included a French photographer, Peter Jouvenal. Then, in May 1998, John Miller from ABC got to interview him on camera. (Miller had a long career as a TV journalist but also has been deputy police commissioner working in counterterrorism for the NYPD and the FBI.) ABC broadcast interviews with Bin Laden (twice), and print interviews appeared in *TIME* and *Newsweek*. Bin Laden also gave interviews to Al Jazeera, a popular Arabic-language satellite TV broadcaster based in Qatar, and to a number of journalists from Muslim countries.

Watching the 1997 CNN broadcast today, it is astounding to see Khaled al-Fawwaz, the man who managed Bin Laden's press office in London, featured as an "independent" commentator. He was Bin Laden's right-hand man. It shows how naïve everyone was in those days about Bin Laden's project and his organization. Before moving to London, al-Fawwaz had been arrested in Nairobi, where he had been building the advance cell for the bombing attacks against the U.S. embassy there.[81] He bribed himself out of prison in Kenya and went back to Sudan where Bin Laden was then based, and later moved to London. In 2015, al-Fawwaz was sentenced to life in prison in federal court in Manhattan on charges related to his role in organizing the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

The broadcasts inadvertently reinforced the perception that Bin Laden was a "guy in a cave" in a faraway place that had not caught up with modern life. Bin Laden himself was invariably found sitting cross-legged on plain

rugs placed on a mud floor, dressed in traditional clothing. He is immobile, a gun at his side. He speaks in Arabic, in slow deliberate tones. All the interviews were conducted with a translator. His gun was Russian, a Kalashnikov. The weapon is also known as AK-47, the favorite of revolutionaries of all persuasions. It was not revealed that the interviews were organized out of Bin Laden's business office in London, that Bin Laden understood English very well, and that he regularly watched the BBC.

The image of the "guy in a cave" invoked familiar Western stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. It also invoked an aura of authenticity that played on two audiences; that of the huddled Muslim masses he hoped to awake to their mission and the "far enemy" that he wanted to be very afraid. In December 1998, Bin Laden was indicted by a grand jury in New York for his role in the 1998 bombings in East Africa. At the same time, the United Nations Security Council imposed travel and financial sanctions on members of the Taliban-controlled government of Afghanistan and demanded that the Taliban stop providing sanctuary to Bin Laden. Bin Laden was now an internationally wanted terrorist. He held a press conference in Kandahar. It was attended by only a single journalist, to whom Bin Laden read a statement denying that he had had a hand in the bombings of the U.S. East African embassies. However, he affirmed his support for the plotters, and acknowledged that he knew and admired the people involved.

The reaction in Europe and elsewhere was tepid. An unnamed British security expert, interviewed by *The Guardian*, said, "I just don't think that a guy in a cave in Afghanistan can send off e-mails over a satellite phone ordering mass destruction anywhere in the world . . . Real life is not like James Bond films. It is just not that easy to hold the world to ransom."[82] In fact, Bin Laden *was* sitting in a cave using a satellite phone to give orders to associates in Africa and Europe and ordering mass destruction.

In hiding

The last chapter of Bin Laden's life began in October 2001, when American troops and coalition forces descended on Afghanistan.

Al Qaeda's upper echelon and their families—including members of Bin Laden's family—fled to Pakistan or Iran. Many lived in Iran for more than a decade, in and out of house arrest. Why the Iranians hosted elite Al Qaeda operatives and their families is an open question. Cathy Scott-Clark and

Adrian Levy, in their book The *Exile* (2017) based on interviews with surviving Al Qaeda defectors, suggest that the Iranians had mixed motives.[83] Moderates wanted to use the families and the upper echelon cadre in their custody as bargaining chips with the United States to lift sanctions. The Iranian extremists instead saw the Al Qaeda men as allies, to be managed carefully, in the war against "the Americans."

Bin Laden himself escaped capture during the fateful days of the Battle of Tora Bora, the mountainous region bordering Pakistan where he had placed one of his settlements. His escape in December 2001 has been the topic of many books and official investigations.[84] He is believed to have camped out with supportive tribes in the border regions between Pakistan and Afghanistan until 2005, when he moved to the newly built compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. This is where he and what remained of his family lived for six years until he was captured and killed by two teams of U.S. Special Forces who flew in on helicopters from an American base Afghanistan.

Bin Laden and his family lived on the second and third floors of the Abbottabad house, which was built for him in 2006. It is not known where Bin Laden lived while the house was being readied. Video footage of the compound released by the Pakistani government after the raid showed a large but modest house evidently designed to be largely self-sufficient. It had no air conditioning or heating, and no internet connection or telephone lines connected the residents to the outside world.[85] A room on the ground floor was used to homeschool the children. One of the wives, Khairiah Sabar, who is a child psychologist and has a Ph.D., did the teaching. Bin Laden would drop in to check up on the children's progress in math and English.[86] The residents in the compound were hidden behind tall walls. At the rear were a large kitchen garden and livestock to supply the residents.

Twenty-four people lived in the compound, including three of Bin Laden's wives, nine of his children and a number of grandchildren. They lived a secluded life. One of the wives later told investigators that Bin Laden and his family members never left the compound in the six years that they lived there. A courier and guard, Abu Ahmed al-Kuwaiti, was his lifeline to the outside. Al-Kuwaiti carried letters out on USB memory sticks and took the files to contacts who downloaded and sent Bin Laden's missives on to their intended recipients. He then brought back the return mail, also on memory sticks. Since there was no internet access, everything had to be brought in on

memory sticks and copied onto the computers in the house. Who watched what on the computers is not known, but it may fairly be assumed that some of the files were intended for other residents in the house.

Considering the circumstances, the collection of files taken from the hard drives of the computers brought back by the SEALs from Abbottabad was surprisingly large.[87] The list of video files released by the U.S. government runs from lighthearted entertainment to sermons and footage of suicide attacks. There were also guides on how to use Google (in Arabic) and instruction manuals (in English) for using Adobe Acrobat and for digital video production. Salafi-jihadist classics, such as *The Defense of Muslim Lands* and *Join the Caravan* by Abdullah Azzam and *Democracy: A Religion* by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, were there, too. Someone in the house watched *Tom and Jerry* cartoon movies and Jackie Chan movies. There are two dozen instruction videos on crocheting.[88] A large collection of inane GIFs that may have been downloaded inadvertently clogs the file library. Loaded on one computer was a video of the Rowan Atkinson comedy *Mr. Bean* dubbed into Pashtu.

There were episodes of *Wallace and Gromit*, an animated show featuring a man and his dog, made out of colorful modeling clay resembling playdough. The popular YouTube hit, "Charlie bit my finger," showing a boy and his little brother, watched by families across the world, evidently entertained Bin Laden's hidden household. The family homeschooled their children in Arabic but video files teaching English lettering and counting were in the collection, which suggests the children were taught English. "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," an old English lullaby was there. Adapted to musical instruments, the song violates the orthodox prohibition on any music that is not vocal. (It is also undeniably "Western.") Other files suggestive of a less than strict household include a guide to the popular *Delta Force Extreme 2* video game and "Rock_Band_in_Jazirat_ul_Arab_3.jpg."

According to some reports, Bin Laden kept a "stash of pornography" in Abbottabad, but no pornography was included identified by title.[89] A few files that were released got the attention of journalists; e.g. "booby_2.JPG" and "breasts9060.jpg."[90] My students and I opened the files and discovered that "booby" did not refer to female anatomy but to a diagram showing how to make the electric circuit in booby-trapped bombs. The "breast" photo displayed instructions for how to put on protective breastplates.

The CIA also found an impressive collection of downloaded reports written by governments, think tanks, and academics about Bin Laden and

Al Qaeda. These include an encyclopedia published by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point that featured the most read jihadist "public intellectuals." (It is listed under "Think Tanks and Other Studies" on the site.[91]) There were reports and analyses from the Congressional Research Service, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, the RAND Corporation, and the Jamestown Foundation. Bin Laden's choice of books was occasionally surprising but generally revealing. The serious books about U.S. politics and history would have kept him busy reading for some time. Among them were *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* by Paul Kennedy and *Obama's Wars* by Bob Woodward. Noam Chomsky's *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* was also on the shelf.[92] (Amazon does not deliver to Pakistan so Bin Laden must have had other delivery systems.) Bin Laden also read articles downloaded from Newsweek and the Washington Quarterly.

Bin Laden evidently also had an interest in anti-Semitic conspiracy theorists and 9/11-deniers. On his shelves was *America's War on Terrorism*, by Michel Chossudovsky, a Canadian 9/11 denier and so-called "Truther" advocate, who writes that the American military-industrial complex was responsible for the 9/11 attacks and that Al Qaeda was a pawn of the CIA, created as "false flag" machinations to justify war and budgets for U.S. military and intelligence agencies.

Among other surprises are publications put out by the London-based publisher of a rival extremist group, *Hizb ut-Tahrir*. (The group is considered extremist but is not in the jihadist camp.) These include a guide to architecture in the post-revolution Islamic state and books on why the capitalist world system is doomed. Another surprise is a stash of documents (in English) about France and French companies operating abroad. The French files may, perhaps, be explained by two statements issued by Bin Laden on January 21 and 22, 2011, warning the French of dire consequences to follow from their decision to continue to maintain troops in Afghanistan. These were the last public missives from Bin Laden.[93]

The Bin Laden family had few home videos. There was a video of shrieking children and chickens running around inside the compound. One video found in Abbottabad was taken at the wedding of Hamza Bin Laden. The wedding took place in Iran, probably in 2005, where members of Bin Laden's family took refuge after the expulsion from Afghanistan in 2001. Hamza was born in Jeddah in 1989 and was therefore seventeen years old at the time of the wedding. The bride was the daughter of Abu Mohammad

al-Masri, the alias for Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, another Egyptian who was present at the founding meeting of Al Qaeda in 1988.

It is fair to assume that the wedding video was sent to Abbottabad so that Bin Laden could watch what was, in Al Qaeda terms, a royal marriage. Several other top Al Qaeda leaders listed on the United Nations' list of wanted international terrorists are seen in the wedding video.[94]

In some of the letters from the Abbottabad cache, Bin Laden expressed great concern for the safety of Hamza. In one letter, he instructed associates to protect Hamza and make sure he never walked out alone, and then only when cloud cover hampered the American surveillance drones. All this suggests that Hamza was being groomed to become Bin Laden's successor. He was killed by a U.S. drone strike in the border territory between Afghanistan and Pakistan in July 2019.[95]

Hamza's father-in-law and bride died in 2020. One of the last survivors of the founding generation, Abu Mohammad al-Masri was assassinate in Teheran in August 2020 together with his daughter Miriam, Hamza's widow, in a drive-by shooting. Intelligence officials confirmed in November 2020 that the assassinations were carried out in a joint operation between Israeli and U.S. intelligence agencies. Bin Laden's daughter-in-law was allegedly hit because she too was being groomed for a leadership role in Al Qaeda.[96] If accurate, the rise of a woman to a leadership role would have signaled adaptation to a changed perspective on women's roles in the movement.

The making of Bin Laden

Bin Laden was a paradoxical figure. Michael Scheuer, who in 1996 became the first chief of the CIA's analysis unit tracking Bin Laden, depicted him as a "formidable enemy" whose piety, integrity, and skills should be respected.[97] Scheuer also characterized him as a ruthless and brilliant strategic thinker. He was a man who accomplished what he set out to do; namely, create a global vanguard that would go to war for the revolution and win back Muslim lands taken by the "crusaders."[98] (It is easy to see why Scheuer's book was on Bin Laden's shelf in Abbottabad.) Peter Bergen described him as a savvy organizer who learned from his father's rise how to build and manage a huge corporation. His global terrorist organization had a robust business plan and a marketing strategy that enabled local adaptation and initiative while harnessing modern technology. Trained in his father's

corporation, Bin Laden followed the business school mantra: stick to the vision; make a plan; network. Steven Coll described Bin Laden rather differently, as a reluctant terrorist who might not have turned to global terrorism if the Saudi royal family had played their cards differently. According to some other accounts, Bin Laden was a front for the true Robespierre, al-Zawahiri.[99]

So far as his private life was concerned, Bin Laden does not fully fit the stereotype of a religious fanatic. He was a pious man and managed his family relations in accordance with religious orthodoxy, but he did not always practice what he preached. His letters and his wives' testimonies show that he loved and respected the wives, even as they left him. But he could be tough, even cruel. As mentioned above in connection with Najwa Bin Laden, he allowed his wives to divorce him but kept the children, even the young ones. He was keen to educate his children but married off his daughters at a young age.

But his reading habits did not conform to stereotypes. He read widely, in English. According to one of his former bodyguards who was with him in Afghanistan in late 1998, Bin Laden's favorite books were about great men: Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and Ho Chi Minh, all Marxist revolutionaries who mired the United States in costly wars. But the reading list included studies of World War II leaders, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Field Marshall Montgomery, and Charles de Gaulle.[100] It is fair to assume that Bin Laden aspired to become a world historical figure in the manner of the people whose biographies he read.

Bin Laden was shrewd in his use of symbolism. His decision never to speak English in his televised interviews is one example. His clothing and body language are another. He often carried a ceremonial dagger in his belt, a privilege traditionally afforded to certain Arab rulers. In pictures of Bin Laden distributed in Pakistan he was shown riding on a white horse, suggestive of saintly status. Jewelry is disallowed to orthodox Sunni men but in videos Bin Laden was seen wearing a large ring with a black stone, an allusion to the Ka'aba, evoking Mecca, the holiest of places to Muslims.[101] In Afghanistan, Bin Laden regularly dressed like his Afghan hosts. Sometimes, however, he would wear the Palestinian *keffieh*, a distinctive headdress, and at other times a white turban to indicate a claim to clerical status. But he never wore the black turban, which is reserved for descendants of the Prophet. In contrast, the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, wore the black turban when he declared the Islamic States' new "caliphate" in 2014,

signaling descent from the Prophet and therefore a legitimate claim to the post of "*caliph*."

Bin Laden crafted his image carefully to suggest that he was the new Muslim Prophet, the heir to Muhammad. If this claim had been made directly, it would have been blasphemous, so it was planted indirectly cloaked in symbols. Among the video files captured in the Abbottabad raid were "outtakes" from Bin Laden's videoed statements to the world that showed him practicing the delivery of his messages, stopping and starting again to get it just right. The projection of strength, vigor, and masculinity were central to his script. He is often shown riding a horse, carrying a rifle, or surrounded by his wives and many children. As he grew older, his video recordings show his beard going from black to streaked with gray, then to all gray, and then from gray to pitch black. It is obvious that he started to dye his beard and hair for the video productions. It is notable that al-Zawahiri, the current emir, who was born in 1951, has shown no similar concerns with the signs of aging.

Was it sinful of Bin Laden to dye his hair? Some Islamist authorities denounce vanity and adornment as religiously incorrect. However, when I went to Google to find an authority on the issue, I found that the topic was covered by in a Q&A section on a website with Salafist credentials and dedicated to the purpose of providing fatwas in response to write-in questions. The perhaps surprising answer was that it is okay: "It is permissible for women to dye their hair black as a means of adornment for their husbands. A group of the Prophet's Companions and *Tabi'een* (the generation that succeeded the Companions) also deemed it permissible for men to dye their hair black if it does not include fraud and deception [...]. However, it is more appropriate for men to refrain from this to avoid the scholarly disagreement over dying hair black."[102] Bin Laden was not trying to hide his identity, just to look younger, which may count for vanity but not fraud.

Bin Laden's efforts to project a saintly image worked to a degree. Western audiences might conclude that he was an old-school religious fanatic. However, many Muslim viewers apparently did see him as a son of Islam who had noble intentions, even if he was perhaps misguided in the means he chose. Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes program tracked Bin Laden's approval ratings—if that is the right term. It found that his popularity peaked in the aftermath of the United States' ill-fated invasion of Iraq in 2003, when favorable views of Bin Laden and Al Qaeda among Muslim publics peaked at 50% to 60% of respondents.[103] The highest favorability

ratings were in Palestine, in Nigeria, and Indonesia. Ten years later, in 2012, Bin Laden's favorability ratings had dropped to a high of 21% in Egypt (a remarkable number still) and to 13% and 15% respectively in Pakistan and Jordan.[104]

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3

The 1993 World Trade Center Bombing

At noon on February 26, 1993, Ramzi Yousef and Eyad Ismoil drove a rented Ryder truck into the public underground garage in the basement of the North Tower of the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan. The men lit the fuse and walked away. The truck was loaded with a fertilizer bomb connected to propane gas cylinders. The bomb's design resembled that used by Hezbollah in the bombing of barracks housing French and U.S. Marines in Lebanon in 1983.[1]

The bomb was extremely efficient but not as efficient as the terrorists had hoped. Four floors in the concrete underground garage caved in, trapping a number of people. The elevators were stuck. The stairwells filled with thick black smoke, which rose to the ninety-third floor. Very fortunately, only six people were killed. The electricity supply as well as the emergency backup in both the North and South Towers closed down. Much of Lower Manhattan lost electricity and telephone service. It took a week to get the electric supply back up and running. Yousef, who was the bomb maker, later told investigators that the plotters had expected that the North Tower would crumble and take down the second Tower in the iconic World Trade Center, and that they had planned to kill a quarter of a million people. Large amounts of cyanide were later found in the storage unit where the bomb was made but the plan to augment the blast with cyanide fumes went awry. The cyanide packed into the bomb burned up in the explosion.[2]

The men had assembled the bomb in an apartment in Jersey City, New Jersey, and driven it to Manhattan. They belonged to a large cell of militants congregating around a fiery Egyptian sheikh in Brooklyn, Omar Abdel-Rahman, known by the New York dailies as the "Blind Sheikh."

It was not the first time the Brooklyn-based group had carried out a violent attack. It was responsible for the killing of a rabble-rousing, ultra-orthodox Rabbi, Meir Kahane. The founder of an organization called the Jewish Defense League (JDL) and the anti-Arab Israeli Kach party, he too was implicated in assassinations and bombings.[3] Later it would be discovered that the cell in Brooklyn was also responsible for the murder of a former colleague in the movement, Mustafa Shalabi. Shalabi ran a successful fundraising campaign linked to the al-Kifah network, the chain of charities set up by Abdullah Azzam with Bin Laden's help to support volunteers traveling to Afghanistan. But Shalabi and Omar Abdel-Rahman quarreled over how to spend the money now that the fight in Afghanistan had been won and Azzam was dead. So, Shalabi was denounced and murdered.[4]

A decade later, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, set up in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks to investigate why the United States had missed the threat posed by Bin Laden looked into the 1993 bombing. (The commission is informally known as the "9/11 Commission" and its final report as the 9/11 Commission Report, which is how they are referenced here.) The report described the networks responsible as "the new virus of which these individuals were just the first symptoms," and lamented that the trial in the 1993 bombing case failed to bring Bin Laden's role to the attention of the public and policy makers.[5]

A little-known fact is that Bin Laden had already been named in the investigation of the 1993 bombing. The indictment filed by the U.S. Department of Justice against Omar Abdel-Rahman and his accomplices listed Bin Laden as number 95 on a long list of unindicted co-conspirators.[6] The list was not made public until years later.

It *was* a long list. It included many names that later became implicated in attacks against the United States, including the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the 9/11 attacks. The overlaps between the operatives in the bombings supported the 9/11 Commission's conclusion that American intelligence agencies and the country's political leaders had underestimated Al Qaeda and failed to track the threat posed by the emerging global network.

Today, it is difficult to understand why the Brooklyn-based militants were able to operate with the degree of transparency that they enjoyed. The answer is that most Americans, including the FBI and the NYPD, had little knowledge about Islam, knew no Muslims, and ignored the far-fetched plans of immigrant preachers. I once lived not far from their perch near

Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn and went shopping occasionally in the bazaars along the street. It was a cosmopolitan slice of life in New York, and all for the best. Few of us could recognize the difference between ordinary immigrants and the extremists. If anyone paid attention at all to the new elements in the city, they were likely to focus on the human rights abuses of autocratic regimes in North Africa and the Middle East. The assumption was that the refugees wanted to replace tyrants with more democratic regimes and would not cause trouble for their hosts. Islamist extremists were seen as political activists like the Irish Republican Army, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and other groups engaged in violent nationalist struggles. The fact that they wanted to establish a global religious dictatorship based on a perverse reading of Islamic law did not register. New York City has a big heart. It was big enough to let the newcomers in.

Moreover, the U.S. government and the public were still preoccupied with on-the-run Marxist groups left over from the 1970s and, more recently, with eco-terrorism. Three people had been killed and twenty-three injured by a shadowy anarchist nicknamed the UNABOMBER who had sent sixteen letter bombs to computer specialists, university professors, and airlines. The bomber, Ted Kaczynski, was not caught until 1995. There were worries about unsolved loose ends in the aftermath of the 1993 bombing, and these were reawakened by a second prosecution related to the Brooklyn cell. But these concerns were eclipsed when, on April 19, 1995, two domestic right-wing extremists set off a truck bomb at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, killing 168 people.

A failed assassination in Rome

Perhaps surprisingly, it was in Rome rather than in New York, Paris, or London that Bin Laden first sponsored a terrorist incident in the West. In November 1991, a Portuguese-Angolan convert to Islam, Paulo José De Almeida Santos, attempted to kill the then eighty-seven-year-old former king of Afghanistan, Mohammed Zahir Shah, who had been living in exile in Italy since 1973. Masquerading as a journalist, Santos was granted a meeting with the king. About an hour into the interview, Santos rose from his chair and declared: "Now, I must kill you!" He brought out a ceremonial dagger that he had pretended was a gift. After removing the gift-wrapping,

he plunged it into the king's chest. It was deflected by a metal cigar case in the king's breast pocket. Santos was arrested and sent to prison. Ten years later, after his release from prison, in an interview with the Portuguese magazine *Expresso* Santos explained that because he had enjoyed the king's hospitality for more than an hour and felt pity his resolve had failed him.[7]

Santos had been recruited into Al Qaeda in 1990 while on a pilgrimage to Mecca, and he was sent to a training camp in Afghanistan. The war against the Najibullah government and its Soviet supporters was nearly over. Recruits spent their days jogging in the mountains with backpacks and learning to make bombs and their nights around campfires discussing plans for *jihad*. It was there, Santos said, that he came up with the idea of killing the king. Some anti-communist Afghan fighters were in favor of bringing the king back as a figurehead for a new authentic Afghan regime, but the Islamist faction of Afghan militants with whom Bin Laden was allied, did not like that idea, for obvious reasons.[8]

In his interview, Santos claimed that he had pitched the idea of assassinating the king to Bin Laden during a party at Bin Laden's house in Peshawar.[9] "Bin Laden at that time did not give any orders," Santos explained. If people wanted to "do something," they sought a meeting with him and if he approved he would provide funding.[10] "The Contractor" was one of Bin Laden's many aliases.[11]

The attempted assassination in Rome was seen at the time as an isolated incident committed by a madman, and it was never tied to Bin Laden's project. However, confirmation of Bin Laden's role in the plot emerged a decade later in February 2001 during the trial of the cell responsible for the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Kenyan and Tanzania. The U.S. prosecutor, Patrick Fitzgerald, questioned a witness, L'Houssaine Kherchtou, about a visit made to Rome by one of the defendants, Ali Abdel Saoud Mohamed, more commonly known as Ali Mohamed.

It turned out that Ali Mohamed, at the behest of Bin Laden, had sent Kherchtou to find out why the assassination plot had failed.[12] Ali Mohamed had been had been Santos' instructor at the training camp in Afghanistan. If Bin Laden ordered Ali Mohamed to find out what had gone wrong, this suggests that Bin Laden had ordered the assassination. In the 1990s, Mohamed was Bin Laden's chief manager of everything: the 1993 World Trade center bombing, the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in East Africa, personal travel agent, and trainer of Bin Laden's security guard.

The Kahane killing

The campaign in New York City also started off with an assassination. In November 1990, five months after Omar Abdel-Rahman arrived in Brooklyn one of his followers, El Sayyid Nosair, shot and killed Meir Kahane, the ultra-nationalist rabbi.

The murder took place in a Manhattan hotel, where Kahane was holding a book-signing event.[13] Disguised as an orthodox Jew, Nosair was driven to the hotel in a yellow cab by two associates from Brooklyn. They were supposed to wait for him to come out after the killing but were shooed away by traffic police. When Nosair ran out of the hotel after shooting Kahane, he mistakenly jumped into another yellow cab parked at the curb. The driver panicked and right away got into an accident. Trying to make a getaway, Nosair got out of the cab ran into a policeman from the U.S. Postal Service, who shot and wounded him. When Nosair's apartment and work place were raided, the police found receipts for the purchase of AK-47 ammunition (but no weapon or ammunition) and a vial of poison hidden in his locker at work.[14] They also discovered a hand-written list of names of possible targets compiled by Nosair. These included a pro-Israeli newspaper columnist, a Congressman, prominent Jewish public officials, and prosecutors and judges who had been involved in the extradition to Israel of a Palestinian terrorist belonging to the Abu Nidal organization.[15]

Based in Brooklyn, not far from where Omar Abdel-Rahman had his headquarters, the JDL was itself an extremist movement. Members had been found guilty of crimes in connection with a series of terrorist incidents, including a firebombing of Lincoln Center in Manhattan in 1986.[16] In December 2001, the FBI prevented two JDL members from bombing the offices of the Muslim Public Affairs Council in Los Angeles, the office of Darrell Issa, an Arab-American Congressman, and a mosque in Culver City.

The legal framework for terrorism prosecutions was at the time burdensome to apply, and the assassination was prosecuted as an act of murder rather than an act of terrorism. Two famous New York lawyers, William M. Kunstler and Ronald L. Kuby, took on Nosair's defense. They conceded during the trial that Nosair had been on the scene and in possession of a gun, but persuaded the jury that there was no evidence that Nosair had actually shot Kahane. Perhaps, they suggested, Kahane had been shot by one of his own followers? Kahane's body had been buried immediately without

an autopsy, in conformity with Orthodox Jewish practice. Consequently, there was no forensic evidence to tie Nosair's gun to the murder. The defense argument worked. Nosair was acquitted of the murder charge but sentenced to go to prison for a weapons offense.[17]

Nosair was imprisoned in upstate New York, where his cousin and members of the cell in Brooklyn who were planning the World Trade Center attack took turns to visit him for instructions. Nosair was still in prison at the time of the 1993 bombing. After the bombing, he was retried and convicted of the murder of Kahane. He was also convicted on other charges that only came to light after the bombing. These included the bombing of a gay bar in New York City and an ineffectual attempt to assassinate the president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, and the president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, when the two leaders were visiting New York City.[18] Ibrahim El-Gabrowny who was a member of the Brooklyn circle and Nosair's cousin, received 20,000 dollars (the equivalent of 40,000 dollars in 2020) from Bin Laden towards paying for Nosair's legal team.[19] Bin Laden was at that time flush with money from the payout from the family corporation. That he was involved in the 1993 bombings is now obvious. How involved is probably lost to history.

The New York media treated the Kahane assassination as a case of madman vs. madman. The FBI blamed a "lone, deranged gunman." That was also what the mayor, David Dinkins, told the public. Federal prosecutors stressed that they believed Nosair had acted on his own. Not everybody was satisfied with the lone madman hypothesis, however. "There are three possibilities," a federal agent commented to *The New York Times* in December 1990. "Either the man [Nosair] is a lone nut. Or he's a lone nut and someone whispered something in his ear knowing he'd do it. Or there's an enormous international conspiracy."[20]

The murder of Kahane put the spotlight on Abdel-Rahman. When the Kahane investigation led the FBI to the mosque on Atlantic Avenue, the State Department had to explain how the sheikh had been able to settle there. "He's like an Ayatollah Khomeini," explained an unnamed State Department official to *The New York Times*. "He's been known for rather fiery sermons in the past. The Egyptians were treading lightly as to how to deal with the guy."[21] The New York Police Department did not buy the story. "Is it strange that the sheik's [*sic*] in a mosque in Brooklyn?," Lieutenant Angel Cruz told *The New York Times*. "I don't know. If the Pope came to New York, would you expect him to stay at St. Pat's?"[22] In fact, Abdel-Rahman was on

the State Department's blacklist and should never have been given a visa for the United States. In fact, the State Department was unaware that an Egyptian terrorist and militant sheikh, who had been banned from entering the country, was living openly in Brooklyn.

Nosair also should not have been in the United States. He graduated from a university in Cairo in 1978 and is believed to have trained with the Abu Nidal group, a terrorist organization that catered to both Marxist and religious extremists. He came to the United States in 1981, at a time when the Egyptian authorities were cracking down on militants. Nosair first moved in with family friends in Pittsburgh. In 1982, he married an American woman who had converted to Islam, and so he was able to obtain American citizenship in 1989. He joined a mosque in Pittsburg but was ejected after complaints of sexual assault and battery by women in the congregation. Nosair harangued co-workers about Islam and politics, and lost his job as a result. In 1986, he moved with his family to New Jersey, where his extremist views again got him in trouble with a local mosque. He then organized his own circle of worshippers who met at his house. Several members of the prayer group joined the Brooklyn cell, as did his cousin, Ibrahim El-Gabrowny. The prayer group formed the nucleus of the cell responsible for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.

A shooting at Langley

In January 1993, one month before the World Trade Center bombing, a Pakistani militant, Mir Qazi, also known as Mir Aimal Kansi or Kasi, opened fire on CIA employees who were queuing at the highway entry ramp on their way to work at the Langley headquarters. Two CIA employees were killed and three wounded. Qazi escaped after the attack but was apprehended in Pakistan in 1994 when an acquaintance turned him in for the bounty offered by the U.S. government. He was tried for murder in the United States, found guilty, and executed at Greensville Correction Center in southeast Virginia on November 14, 2002.[23]

Qazi, who came from a wealthy family, had arrived in the United States two years before the attack, traveling on a forged visa. He settled in Reston, Virginia, and found a job at a courier company. After the shootings, co-workers described him as a "very nice guy." "He would bring muffins on a Monday, and when you would thank him, he would blush and turn away,"

said a co-worker. "He was very, very quiet."[24] After the shootings, Kansi's roommate in Virginia was convicted on charges of perjury and of making a false statement on his application to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, but there was no evidence that he had been involved in Kansi's plans, and he was later granted political asylum in the United States.[25]

The Langley shooting remains something of a mystery. Qazi told his interrogators that the director of the CIA, Robert Gates, was his real target and that he had acted to punish the United States on account of its foreign policy. Before his execution, he told a journalist from the BBC's Urdu service that he had once met Bin Laden but denied that he acted on his behalf: "I saw Bin Laden once in Kandahar. I was standing there. People were shaking his hands—I, too, shook hands with him." But, he stressed, "He didn't know me."[26] The meeting has never been confirmed by any other sources. Bin Laden did not claim responsibility for the shootings but, at that time, he never took responsibility for any of the plots he sponsored. To this day, Qazi is the only Islamist terrorist to have been executed in the United States.

The 1993 World Trade Center bombing

The bombing in Lower Manhattan was a co-production between two Egyptian terrorist groups and Bin Laden. Bin Laden built Al Qaeda by co-opting and repurposing existing networks. The Egyptians were his first network merger.[27]

Two Egyptian groups were around the table in Peshawar in 1988, in Bin Laden's house, when Al Qaeda was formed. These were the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) and *al-Gama'a Islamiyya*, which is often referred to in English as the "Islamic Group." Omar Abdel-Rahman, from 1990 on based in Brooklyn, was the leader (emir) of *al-Gama'a*. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Bin Laden's second-in-command as leader of Al Qaeda, was the emir of the EIJ. (To avoid confusion between the two groups, al-Zawahiri's group is here referred to by its English name and the latter is referred to as *al-Gam'a*.[28])

The two groups did parallel play for a decade until 1998, when both signed up to the declaration of a united World Islamic Front issued by Bin Laden and his associates under the title "*Jihad* Against Jews and Crusaders."[29]

Al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden were represented in the New York conspiracy by two agents, Ali Mohamed and Wadih el-Hage. The two men were both married to American women, and both had become American

citizens through their marriages. (El-Hage's marriage was a love match. Ali Mohamed's was probably a marriage of convenience.)

Longtime members of the inner circle of Al Qaeda, the two men had taken care of Bin Laden's affairs in Pakistan and Sudan and traveled the world on his behalf. They avoided arrest in 1993.

Ramzi Yousef, the bomb maker, was not a member of Al Qaeda. Throughout his stay in New York, he was in touch with his powerful uncle, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (known by his initials as KSM), the terrorist master planner working for Bin Laden. He went on to build increasingly sophisticated bombs for Bin Laden's many projects, about which more follows, but Yousef's career was mercifully short. He was arrested in 1995 in Islamabad, Pakistan, after a tip-off.

The other World Trade Center plotters were hardly unknown to the American authorities.[30] Several of the men in the Brooklyn cell had fought with the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan. As was the case in Europe, however, no statutes forbade Americans from going abroad to fight in civil wars. United States citizens could, in theory, lose their citizenship if they enrolled in a foreign army but only if they intended to forfeit their American nationality.[31] The *mujahideen* militias were not a foreign army. In any case, the United States had supported the insurgency in Afghanistan.

Arrests were made quickly after the bombing. The FBI traced the truck that delivered the bomb to a Ryder rental agency in New Jersey. When one of the co-conspirators returned to the car rental to claim the truck stolen and get back his deposit for the truck used, he was promptly arrested. His arrest quickly led the FBI to his associates, who all lived in the same building in New Jersey. The FBI then discovered that the conspirators responsible for the bombing were based at Abdel-Rahman's mosque in Brooklyn.

Abdul Rahman Yasin, another plotter who got away, claimed in an interview in 2002, when he was held in a prison in Baghdad by Saddam Hussein's regime, that they had initially planned to bomb a Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn. But testimonies and the elaborate planning involved in the construction of the bomb make it clear that Yousef and his uncle always intended that the World Trade Center should be the target.[32] Yousef liked to have several plots going at the same time. Killing Jews was "a good thing," he testified later, but that was not what he had been contracted to do in 1993.

Yousef flew out of New York on the evening of the bombing and went into hiding. Before leaving the United States, he had sent a letter to *The*

New York Times claiming responsibility for the attack in the name of a vaguely Marxist-sounding organization, the "fifth battalion in the Liberation Army." The letter claimed that the bombing was "done in response for the American political, economic, and military support to Israel, the state of terrorism, and to the rest of the dictator countries in the region," and listed various demands including the withdrawal of support for Israel and that the United States should cease "interfering" in Middle Eastern countries.[33] The letter could have been Yousef's own idea. Bin Laden was not at that time given to boasting about Al Qaeda's terrorist hits.

After the initial arrests, the FBI placed the Brooklyn mosque under surveillance and reactivated an informant who had previously infiltrated Abdel-Rahman's inner circle. The militants in Brooklyn had initially been placed under surveillance in 1989 after casino owners in New Jersey became concerned about rumors that they were to be targeted by religious fanatics. The Kahane assassination again drew attention to the men around the cleric in Brooklyn. Concerns were raised once more in 1992, when the FBI and NYPD learned that some men in the Brooklyn network were talking about blowing up Jewish targets.[34] So much information was already on file that it did not take long for the authorities to zero in on the Brooklyn-based group after the bombing of the World Trade Center.

The FBI informant taped conversations between the members of the cell, which revealed that the World Trade Center bombing was intended to be the first installment of a campaign to bomb multiple targets in New York City. So it was that a second conspiracy was uncovered. Among the targets discussed were the George Washington Bridge, the United Nations and the Lincoln and Holland tunnels. Assassinations of various public figures were also planned.

The Brooklyn co-conspirators were obsessively anti-Semitic and discussed targeting Jews and targets that were symbolically "Jewish" at length. This time, arrests were made before anything happened.

The first trial reached a conclusion in March 1994. Four men, Mahmud Abouhalima, Nidal A. Ajaj, Mohammad Salameh and Nidal A. Ayyad, were convicted of conspiracy, explosive destruction of property, and interstate transportation of explosives. Abdel-Rahman and eleven other men were convicted in a second trial, the "Landmarks" trial, that began in January 1995. The trial proved complicated because some of the accused also faced drug charges.

Eventually, the prosecution was divided into several separate trials. On October 1, 1995, Abdel-Rahman and nine other men were convicted on

forty-eight different charges related to sedition, conspiracy, solicitation of murder, etc.[35] Ramzi Yousef and Eyad Ismoil, who made the bomb and drove the truck carrying it into the parking garage under one of the Towers, were captured separately in Pakistan and Jordan. They were extradited to the United States to be tried on charges related to their roles in the bombing. Both men were convicted in 1997.

A few of the conspirators got away. One was Abdul Rahman Yasin, who helped Yousef make the bomb. Yasin, an American citizen, was born in Bloomington, Indiana, where his father was studying for a Ph.D. at the University of Indiana. The family returned to Iraq and Yasin grew up in Baghdad, returning to the United States as an adult in 1992.[36] He was arrested together with the other suspects directly after the attack but was released a week later, and immediately left the United States for Iraq. His brother, Musab Yasin, was also involved in the plot. Yousef and Yasin had prior contact because Yousef went straight to Yasin's house in New Jersey when he arrived in New York, and stayed there while he built the bomb.

Abdul Yasin was placed on the United Nation Security Council's sanctions list in 2001 as a designated terrorist for "being associated with *Al-Qaida*, Usama bin Laden or the Taliban [and for] participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing or perpetrating of acts or activities by, in conjunction with, under the name of, on behalf, or in support of [. . .] supplying, selling or transferring arms and related materiel to or otherwise supporting acts or activities of *Al-Qaida*, Usama bin Laden and the Taliban."[37] The listing makes clear his deep involvement in the wider organization. How Yasin ended up in New York City and what his connections were to the international network planning the bombing are not known.

Thirty-five people were convicted in the separate trials related to the bombing. More were added in other trials. This was the largest terrorist network ever uncovered in the United States. The word "terrorism" was not used in the indictments. The men were charged with seditious conspiracy, an arcane charge that had not been used since the Civil War. They were tried and found guilty, and many of them were given life sentences.

These convictions were a triumph for the prosecution, but the trappings of the conspiracy—the blind preacher, the extremist religious declarations, the beards and the clothes—were so outlandish that even law enforcement agencies found it difficult to take it all very seriously.[38] Officers described the plotters as "the dumbest terrorists" they had ever encountered.[39] Years later, the NYPD and the FBI argued over who had been responsible for the

decision to keep the international aspects of the plots out of the courtroom. Turf disputes between the agencies were blamed.[40] The prosecution had heaps of evidence, more than sufficient to convict the Brooklyn-based plotters, and talking darkly about wider international conspiracies would have raised question about whether the men on trial were the real masterminds and might have jeopardized the prosecution. For whatever reason, the broader ramifications of the conspiracy were not brought to the attention of the public.

Bin Laden's name came up in the investigation but neither the authorities nor the public fully grasped what the conspiracy was about. When, in 1997, HBO released a dramatized documentary about the 1993 bombings, *Path to Paradise*, it was marketed as a "black comedy." It was not until the shock of 9/11 that politicians, the media, and the general public began to have some idea of the nature, even the existence, of this new international revolutionary movement: Al Qaeda.

A classic conspiracy

The local members of the 1993 World Trade Center cell had been under observation by the FBI. The foreign agents flew in and out of the United States with ridiculously transparent cover stories. Like a spider sitting in the middle of his net, Omar Abdel-Rahman operated in plain sight. Prosecutions were successful. As a result, we have lots of data.

Social network analysis (SNA) is a methodology used, among other things, for detecting control-and-command structures in social organizations. The methodology uses different measures ("metrics") to assess hierarchies within the network and to identify the most important nodes. Here, "node" refers to a member of the group and "links" (also referred to as "edges") are their contacts with other members of the cell.[41] Further discussion of the methodology can be found in the Appendix.

Using data collected from court documents by the Western Jihadism Project, the organizational structure of the Brooklyn cell was charted. Seventy-three individuals and eleven entities and organizations (mosques, bookstores, trips to shooting ranges, etc.) were found that had connections to Abdel-Rahman and the Brooklyn plotters. The protracted prosecutions of the plotters produced much information about their doings during the built-up to the bombings. From this data we constructed a social network graph of the cell's structure (see Figure 3.1).

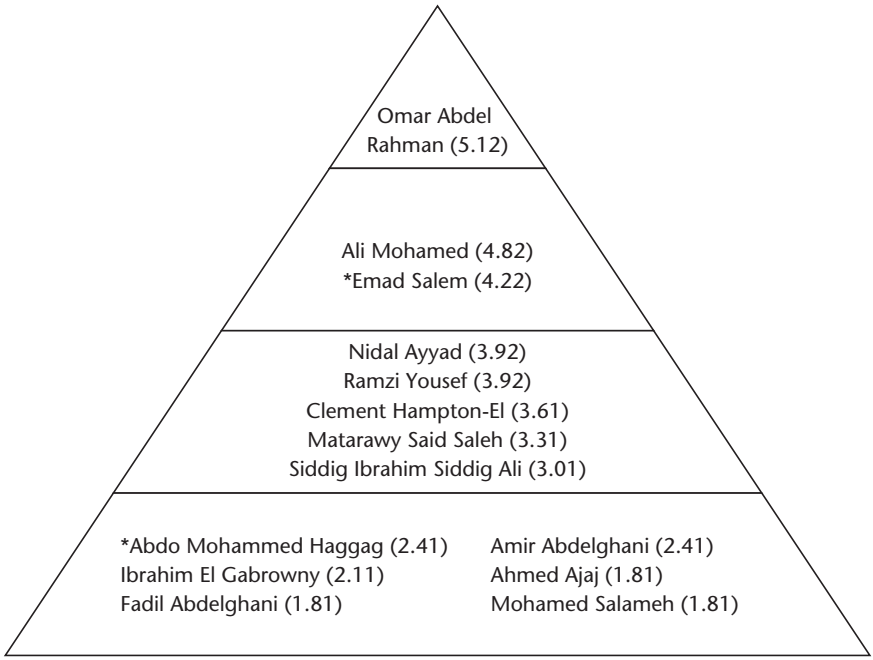

Figure 3.1. Brooklyn-based hub responsible for 1993 WTC attacks and "Landmarks" trial. (Rank-order by in-degree centrality.) A lower fifth tier is not depicted. * Symbol indicates informant.

Source: The Western Jihadism Project. Statistics generated in Ucinet.

Freeman's in-degree centrality scores, a commonly used social network analysis metric, were used to assess the hierarchy in the large Brooklyn-based cell. In-degree scores measure how often other nodes in the network consult a particular node, here a person. To capture the directionality of ties, in-degree centrality counts a node's incoming ties while out-degree centrality counts a node's outward-going ties. Out-degree measures indicate how active nodes are and how much outreach they have in a network. Actors with a high out-degree score typically reach a lot of people and spread information. They may be influential but they are not necessarily the leaders. In-degree indicators, by contrast, capture the positional prominence of a particular node in the network. Nodes with high in-degree scores are at the end-point of communication, meaning that the higher the score the more the node is consulted by others. The metric is particularly useful for the identification of leadership positions in hierarchical networks.

We would expect nodes with the highest in-degree scores to be the senior leaders and managers of the network, while operatives and grunts would have lower scores. Freeman's in-degree centrality measure may work well to assess influence in a relatively flat network, where authority may not be overt and is not exercised directly or openly. Abdel-Rahman was known to have tried to distance himself from day-to-day planning. Conversely, in a hierarchical organization, exemplified perhaps by a police force, the more appropriate measure is out-degree centrality—a measure of who gives the orders.

Rank ordering the cell members based on the in-degree scores produced a clear picture of the distribution of authority. Abdel-Rahman's high in-degree score identifies him as the dominant person in the network. The exercise also identified lower tiers of bosses and grunts in the organization. The scores are listed by rank order in Figure 3.1. Only in-degree scores and the top four tiers are displayed in the figure.

The analysis revealed a strikingly pyramidal organization. For all practical purposes, the cell organization corresponded to a traditional boss vs. grunt hierarchy with vice-presidents and project managers acting as intermediaries. This is not an abstract representation but a diagram of how control-and-command flowed in the organization. What is most remarkable is that everyone was on site. This was not a case of the leadership hiding in a different jurisdiction and the grunts taking the fall. Only the mid-layer of management linked to Bin Laden got away.

Despite Abdel-Rahman's clumsy efforts to pretend he was not in charge, the pattern of communications between the conspirators showed that he was very much the go-to person for the people managing the conspiracy. In the second tier were Abdel-Rahman's two lieutenants, Ali Mohamed and Emad Salem, both former Egyptian army officers.

Emad Salem was also an informant. He came to the United States in 1988 and started working with the FBI on a mafia case.[42] In 1991, he infiltrated the Brooklyn-based group of militants when the FBI briefly put the group under surveillance. He got close to Abdel-Rahman and accompanied him on fundraising trips around the United States. Salem's relationship with the FBI deteriorated due to a pay dispute and his undercover investigation was terminated in June 1992. It was revived in February 1993 after the World Trade Center bombing, and he was a key witness in the trial of the plotters. Salem is now in a witness protection program and has been given a new identity.

The three professional terrorists brought in to help the Brooklyn cell carry out the World Trade Center bombing, Wadih el-Hage, Ali Mohamed, and the bomb maker, Yousef, emerged from our analysis as seconds-in-command. Yousef ranked in the third tier in the pyramid. The reason may be that he spent only six months in the United States or, perhaps, the score indicates that he operated with considerable autonomy and was in contact only with the men who put him up in their homes and helped him build the bomb. Yousef's main contact was his uncle, KSM, and he had few contacts that we know of with the sheikh, Abel-Rahman.

The men had shared bank accounts and safe deposit boxes, to which several third and fourth-level co-conspirators all had access. The FBI found that close to 100,000 dollars had been wired to several bank accounts linked to the men, some of it transferred from an account from Iran.[43] It may be assumed that Bin Laden was the original source of the funding.

The other men in the third tier were important mid-level conspirators. They lived with Yousef in the same building in New Jersey, The bomb was made there. The men—Clement Rodney Hampton-El, Siddig Ibrahim Siddig Ali and Matarawy Mohammed Said Saleh—were arrested on June 24, 1993, and arraigned and convicted in the second trial, the "Landmarks" conspiracy trial.

Race was a significant factor for where in the hierarchy of the cell a conspirator was placed. Hampton-El, who died in 2014, was an African-American convert to Islam. Before he fell under the spell of Abdel-Rahman, he belonged to a militant Black Muslim group known as Moorish Science Temple of America. Hampton-El went by the name of Abdul Rashid Abdullah or "Dr. Rashid." He had been wounded fighting in Afghanistan. He worked as a lab technician in a New York City hospital at the time of the bombing.[44]

Siddig Ali was a Sudanese immigrant. He worked as Abdel-Rahman's translator and security guard and was part of the Brooklyn group from the beginning. He participated in excursions to "training camps" in Pennsylvania and State parks in New Jersey and Connecticut, and worked as a legal aid on Nosair's defense team. He was also accused of having contributed to the plan to assassinate the Egyptian President during his visit to the United Nations. And he helped to build the bomb. Siddig Ali pleaded guilty to all charges and testified for the government in the prosecution of the other members of the cell. He expressed remorse and was given a reduced sentence.[45] One reason he turned against his pals was evidently disgust at their incompetence. He was heard cursing Salameh on surveillance tapes, the cell member who went back to the car rental for his deposit, as "the stupidest

terrorist in the world."[46] Salameh may have been stupid but he needed the money. He was supposed to have flown out after the bombing at the same time as Ramzi Yousef, but Yousef had bought him a child's ticket so Salameh needed extra money to pay for a full ticket.

The fourth tier in the cell structure comprises the grunts in the cell. These fourth-tier cell members all had low in-degree scores and high out-degree scores, which indicated that they received instructions rather than gave them. One of men, Abdo Mohammed Haggag, was an informant, but for the Egyptian government. Another was Nosair's cousin, El-Gabrowny. The cell had planned to break Nosair out of jail. When he was arrested, El-Gabrowny was found in the possession of false Nicaraguan passports for Nosair and his family.

Conspirators in the lowest tiers are not shown in the figure. It is worth noting that four pairs of brothers were involved, including two Sudanese brothers, Fadil and Amir Abdelghani. Four Sudanese men took part in the conspiracy. All drove unlicensed yellow taxis in New York City.

Two Black converts in the group, Karl Dexter Taylor and Earl Gant, were also veterans of the anti-communist *jihad* in Afghanistan. Neither was in a position of authority in the group. Taylor had legally changed his name to Yahya Abu Ubaidah Muhammad. He was arrested buying assault weapons at out of state gun shows and smuggling the weapons to New York City to help Abdel-Rahman's followers wage what the prosecutors described as "a war of urban terrorism." Taylor ran training camps in Pennsylvania for Abdel-Rahman's followers. Grant was convicted of smuggling explosives over state lines. By today's standards, he was let off lightly, sentenced to three and a half years in prison.

The social organization of the Brooklyn cell stands out for a number of reasons. It was a first and a last example of a large, localized attack cell, where all of the different functions required to put together a terrorist campaign were together in one place. The spiritual leader, the military trainers, the funders, the activists, the operatives, and the suppliers of the essential services were all on location. Expert knowledge of how to assemble a bomb was lacking, and for that Yousef was flown in. The Brooklyn cell and the various assistants who provided support for the plot all lived nearby and plotted from apartments in Jersey City, Queens, and Brooklyn. The spiritual leader and the operatives interacted constantly making inept efforts to distance themselves from each other. Only the international operatives who provided the tradecraft flew in and out, removing themselves from the scene of the crimes. The plot was ultimately a failure.

The 9/11 hijackers would do everything differently. They had minimal contact with locals. The teams split up so if one was arrested, the others could continue. Their leadership and management structures were flat. A back office supporting the operatives was in a different jurisdiction. The 1993 cell had integrated all the different functions into one localized network that worked out of a fixed brick-and-mortar base. They got away with their plans only partially but managed to a frightening degree to escape the attention of law-enforcement agencies.

The target, the World Trade Center, was selected with an international audience in mind. The symbolism of taking down the iconic building symbolizing American power would have been a sweet victory for Al Qaeda. The World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan had been officially opened in 1973 to huge worldwide publicity. The Twin Towers, part of a larger complex of seven buildings, was, at the time, the world's largest buildings. They instantly became a tourist attraction that visitors to New York queued up to see. Taking the buildings down was not just about killing many, many people. It was also a symbolic blow against the American Dream. Eight years later, KSM and Bin Laden struck again, fulfilling the ambitions of the 1993 plotters.

The prosecution of Omar Abdel-Rahman had an odd postscript. While the trial and the many appeals dragged on, Abdel-Rahman was incarcerated in a correctional facility in New York City. He persuaded his defense lawyer, a well-known civil rights attorney, Lynne Stewart, to conspire with him to smuggle out instructions to *al-Gama'a* and his Egyptian followers. The conspiracy is described in Textbox 3.1.

The foreign agents

Ali Mohamed is a figure out of a spy novel. His role in the 1993 conspiracy emerges clearly from the charting of the division of labor in the organization, but he did so much more for his bosses, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden. And he got away with it for another five years. A Zelig-like figure, ubiquitous but rarely drawing attention to himself, he avoided arrest in the 1993 trial and continued to travel on Bin Laden's behalf, moving freely between the United States, Africa, and Afghanistan. Before his eventual

Textbox 3.1. The case of Lynne Stewart

Stewart hired a graduate student at City University of New York as a translator and Ahmed Abdel Sattar, a postal worker and a fervid follower of Abdel-Rahman, as a legal aid on her team. During their frequent visits to see their incarcerated client, the three and the translator conspired to pass Abdel-Rahman's messages to the Islamic Group in Egypt. In this way, Abdel-Rahman continued to be involved in a terrorist insurgency in Egypt from behind bars in New York.[47] His interventions were not innocent.

In October 2000, Stewart and her team smuggled out a *fatwā* (a ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority) by Abdel-Rahman "Mandating the Killing of Israelis Anywhere." The message was sent to a contact in London, Yassar al-Sirri, who had it posted on a website.[48] Abdel-Rahman negotiated frictions among the militants in Egypt, always siding with the most extreme faction, and granted permissions to conduct terrorist attacks. Messages were also exchanged with the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group about a hostage taking in the Philippines. The group demanded the release of Abdel-Rahman and Ramzi Yousef in exchange for the release of twenty-seven hostages.[49]

Unbeknownst to Stewart and her team, Sattar's phone was monitored by the U.S. government. The exchange of messages continued until 2002, when Stewart and the others were arrested. Stewart was convicted of helping Abdel-Rahman to communicate with his followers in 2005, sentenced to prison and disbarred.

Stewart later said that she was not "a traitor," and that she did not think Abdel-Rahman was a terrorist. She said she had become fond of him. As she put it, he was worthy of her support because he had been fighting against oppression, and was facing a lifetime of incarceration for struggling against "institutions, which perpetuate capitalism, racism, and sexism."[50]

Lynne Stewart and Omar Abdel-Rahman died of natural causes within weeks of each other in February and March 2017. Stewart, who was 77, had obtained compassionate release from prison. Abdel-Rahman was seventy-nine. He died in prison.[51] Ahmed Abdel Sattar is still incarcerated.

arrest in 1998, he helped plan the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, and provided military training to volunteers and foreign fighters in Bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan. He helped move Bin Laden to Sudan, and then in 1996 back again to Afghanistan. He infiltrated the FBI, the CIA, and the U.S. army while working on the planning of the 1998 embassy bombings in East Africa. All in all, he had an extraordinary career as a professional terrorist.

A former major in the Egyptian army, Ali Mohamed had participated in an officers exchange program in the United States that had been set up after the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace agreement.[52] He was out of Egypt on a military training program when President Sadat was killed in 1981. Nevertheless, he was suspected of having ties to the assassins and was discharged from the Egyptian army in 1984. He then offered his service to the CIA and was assigned to spy on Hezbollah supporters at a mosque in Germany, but when he got there, he told the imam that he was a spy for the CIA.[53]

In 1985, Ali Mohamed flew to the United States.[54] Six weeks later he married an American woman he had met on the plane, and soon after he became an American citizen. He moved in with his wife in Santa Clara, California, where he offered his services to the FBI and was assigned a supervisor in the FBI's San Francisco bureau. In 1986, at the age of thirty-five, Ali Mohamed managed to enlist in the U.S. army and was sent to the JFK Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. He became an instructor with the rank of sergeant and was stationed at Fort Bragg until 1989.

General Stanley A. McCrystal describes in his autobiography how he met Ali Mohamed. In August 1987, McCrystal was directing a training program for Egyptian officers on a base near Cairo. Ali Mohamed, who was by that time working for the U.S. Army, was assigned by the U.S. army to act as his translator. "The athletic, outgoing man, named Ali Abelsoud Mohammad [sic], was quickly invaluable as he accompanied me to some initial meetings," McCrystal wrote.[55] However, the Egyptian officers shunned Ali Mohamed and demanded his transfer out of the country. For his part, McCrystal would go on to lead the U.S. Joint Special Operations Command and to take command of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. He is credited with having found and killed Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

In 1988, Ali Mohamed told his superiors that he was going to Afghanistan to work as a military instructor, and he took leave from the army. When he returned from Afghanistan, he began to make regular trips to visit the militants at the al-Kifah center in Brooklyn, distributing copies of U.S. army training manuals and videos, and giving weapons training. On one occasion,

in 1989, he and his trainees came under surveillance by FBI agents at a shooting range on Long Island. The agents were looking for a gang that was reportedly planning to rob casinos in New Jersey, but they soon concluded that Ali Mohamed's men were not involved in any such enterprise and the surveillance was dropped.[56] The gang, of course, were Abdel-Rahman's followers from Brooklyn.

While he was living in California and still serving in the U.S. Army, he hosted Azzam, taking him to visit the network of al-Kifah centers in the United States. In 1991, Ali Mohamed was also tasked together with el-Hage with helping Bin Laden move to Sudan. In 1992 and 1993, he trained jihadists in Somalia, Eritrea, and Afghanistan on Bin Laden's behalf, and served as chief of security for Bin Laden in Sudan.[57]

Back in the United States, he helped set up a cell in California that raised money for the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, and he organized visits by al-Zawahiri in 1992 and 1995. He was abroad, in Sudan, helping Bin Laden, at the time of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.[58]

At one point, Ali Mohamed was working for Bin Laden, the U.S. army, the FBI, and the CIA, all at the same time. He purloined documents from Fort Bragg and from other locations and placed them everywhere he could. When he was in New York, Ali Mohamed stayed with Nosair and used his house in New Jersey to store the intelligence that he had stolen. According to *The Washington Post*, one manila folder found in Mohamed's house held Green Beret manuals marked "Top Secret for Training" and memos stamped as "Secret" from the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.[59] (Mohamed's story continues in Chapter 4.)

In 1994, the FBI identified Ali Mohamed as a person of interest in connection with the 1993 World Trade Center attack, and the prosecution listed him as one of over a hundred unindicted co-conspirators. In 1994, when the FBI officially first interviewed Ali Mohamed, he offered enough new information about Bin Laden to let the FBI think that he could be turned and become a plant for the U.S. government inside Al Qaeda. But when asked to appear as a witness at the trial, he declined. It was only in 1998, after five years playing cat-and-mouse with the FBI and U.S. prosecutors, that Ali Mohamed was charged as a co-conspirator in the embassy bombings.[60]

Wadih El-Hage was thirty years old when, in 1990, he helped Abdel-Rahman make the move to Brooklyn. He came from a Lebanese Maronite Christian family but grew up in Kuwait, where he converted to Islam. In 1978, he moved to the United States to study urban planning at what is now

the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. After hearing Azzam lecture on the "individual obligation" of Muslims to help the *mujahideen* fight the communists in Afghanistan, he dropped out of college and went to join the *jihad* in Afghanistan. In 1985, he returned to the United States to finish his degree.[61] Three years later, he married an eighteen-year-old American convert to Islam and became a naturalized American citizen.

The family relocated to Tucson, Arizona, where el-Hage became involved with the al-Kifah Center. Later, they moved to Arlington, Texas, ostensibly to be closer to the wife's family. El-Hage was traveling a great deal on Bin Laden's behalf. His mother-in-law later explained to PBS's *FRONTLINE* program that she and her husband followed el-Hage and his young wife to Pakistan several times. "I was the Matron surgical nurse at an Afghan Surgical Hospital," she told PBS. "Wadih did not actually fight, but acted as an educator. My husband went with Wadih to deliver textbooks and Korans to the young people. It was a *Jihad*, a fight for Islam."[62] His wife and his mother and father-in-law would later follow el-Hage to Kenya, but the family also maintained their residence in Texas. Bin Laden paid el-Hage 14,000 dollars annually, which at that time was an excellent salary.

In 1990, el-Hage went to Brooklyn to work for Abdel-Rahman. He is accused of having provided the gun that was used to kill Kahane. El-Hage is also accused of contracting three members of a militant Black Muslim group, *Jamaat al-Fuqra*, to murder a revisionist imam in Tucson, Rashad Khalifa, whose preaching the jihadist-Salafists considered to be un-Islamic.[63] Khalifa's murder was solved only ten years later when one of the culprits was arrested in Canada and his DNA was found to match that found at the murder scene.[64] The murder was another episode in a struggle to control the country-wide U.S. based al-Kifah charities after Azzam's murder. Ten years later, some of the 9/11 hijackers briefly lived in Tucson and went to flight school there.[65] A few months after helping Abdel-Rahman move to Brooklyn, el-Hage went to work for Bin Laden and helped him move his family to Sudan. Testifying before a grand jury, in 1998, el-Hage denied that he knew Bin Laden. When questioned about the Tucson murder, however, he volunteered that he thought it was "a good thing."[66]

Yousef, the bomb maker, was perhaps the most lethal of this trio of professional terrorists. Born in Kuwait in 1967 to a Pakistani father and a Palestinian mother, Yousef graduated in 1990 with a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Wales in Swansea. In 1991 and 1992, he

was trained in bomb-making techniques in Afghanistan. His maternal uncle, KSM, brought him into Bin Laden's employment. KSM, of course, would later mastermind the 9/11 attacks.

Yousef was a master of subterfuge. He used at least a dozen different aliases.[67] Getting to New York City involved carefully staged theatrics. He arrived on September 1, 1992, on a flight from Peshawar to JFK airport. On the same flight was Ahmed Mohammad Ajaj, a Palestinian who had moved to Texas ten years earlier and become a naturalized American citizen. Another of Azzam's American recruits, Ajaj went to the Al Qaeda-run training camp in Khalden, Afghanistan. Ali Mohamed was an instructor there and it is possible that Ajaj was recruited for the mission there.

Yousef and Ajaj's airline tickets were purchased at the same time and although they had consecutive reservation numbers, indicating the tickets were bought together, the two did not sit together. At Kennedy Airport, the two men engaged in an elaborate flimflam act intended to attract maximum attention. Ajaj traveled with doctored passports from Sweden, the United Kingdom, Iraq, Jordan, and Britain. He had phony bankcards, fake ID cards, and forged medical records. And just in case immigration officials were slow on the uptake, he carried military training and bomb-making manuals. Ajaj was immediately arrested and detained. Meanwhile Yousef was passing through immigration on his own. Dressed in a fancy suit, he played the role of a hapless would-be immigrant and asked for asylum. He admitted his passport was false and was held for three days at the airport. He was then released due to overcrowding in the airport's holding pen and given a date for an immigration hearing three months later. He never turned up for his hearing. Pretending to have lost his (false) passport, he got a new one from the Pakistani consulate in New York. Having successfully gamed the immigration system,[68] Yousef moved into an apartment in Jersey City with the other key conspirators in the World Trade Center plot. There, he went to work on building the bomb. He was twenty-four years old.

Throughout his months in New York, Yousef was in constant communication with his uncle. KSM wired money to Yousef in November 1992 from an account in Qatar via another of the conspirators, Mohammad Salameh. Not much else is known about KSM's direct involvement in the 1993 conspiracy.[69] However, KSM himself claimed that the World Trade Center bombing was all his idea, and also that he had instigated the murder of Rabbi Meir Kahane. Under interrogation at GTMO, where he was

incarcerated in 2006 after spending three years in so-called "black hole" detentions, KSM would claim responsibility for nearly every terrorist attack in the 1990s, and for a bunch of attacks that never happened.

There is no doubt, however, about Yousef's relationship with Bin Laden. A CIA memo from 1996 that was made public and is available from the National Security Archive at George Washington University reveals that Yousef was a regular guest at Bin Laden's house in Peshawar, Pakistan, both before and after he went to New York to assemble the bomb that blew up in the basement garage of the WTC in February 1993.[70] On his way to NYC, he also made stopovers in Milan, at an infamous mosque that a few years later emerged as a central exchange for Bin Laden's activities in Europe.

The Danish connection

Evidence given during the trial in New York gave some details of an inordinately complicated global conspiracy that stretched from Afghanistan and Bin Laden's house in Peshawar to Milan, and on to Copenhagen and then Brooklyn. It had tragi-comic elements.

The federal prosecutors in New York, Andrew McCarthy and Patrick Fitzgerald, presented fingerprint evidence that linked Yousef, Ajaj, and Abdel-Rahman to extremists living in Denmark. On his arrival in JFK Airport on September 1, 1992, on the same day and on the same flight on which Yousef was traveling, Ajaj was carrying in his luggage six manuals that gave instructions on how to manufacture bombs, and other documents useful for preparing a terrorist attack. The manuals were covered in the fingerprints of several well-known international terrorists.

One set of prints belonged to Talat Fouad Qassim (alias Abu Talal al-Qasimi), who was Abdel-Rahman's co-emir of the Islamic Group, *al-Gama'a*. Because of Abdel-Rahman's blindness, the rules were that he could not be an operational emir and had to share the leadership with a sighted person. Qassim was living in Denmark at that time. Another set of prints belonged to Qassim's disciple and collaborator in Copenhagen, a Moroccan named Said Mansour.[71] Mansour had hosted Abdel-Rahman when the distinguished guest from Brooklyn visited Copenhagen.

The FBI sent an investigating team to Denmark, and it was determined that other prints on Ajaj's manuals belonged to four Egyptians living in Denmark. Ajaj had never been to Denmark, and nor had Yousef. The

fingerprint evidence suggested that Egyptian militants living on three continents had all held the manual in their hands: in the United States, Denmark, and Afghanistan. It was never resolved how this came to pass.

The other men were Abdel Halim Mohammed Atim Soliman, Mohammed Shauban Mohammed Hassanein, Mohammed Al-Bana, and Hassan Fathallah. They did not live in Copenhagen but in Aarhus, Denmark's second city. (Abdel-Rahman is known to have visited the city on one of his trips to Denmark.[72]) The men were Egyptians who were all thought to have been to the camps in Afghanistan. But by 1992 Bin Laden was in Sudan.

Yousef stopped over in Milan at the Islamic Cultural Center on his travel to New York City, so Milan gets looped in as well. The mosque was home to Sheikh Anwar Shaaban, who in 1992 took command of the jihadist Bosnian *mujahideen*.[73]

The Egyptians in Denmark had been sentenced to death in Egypt on charges related to their membership of *al-Gama'a* and had been granted political asylum in Denmark. During a search of their apartments, the Danish police found bomb-making instructions, mercury, invoices for chemicals, a sketch of terrorist targets in Denmark, a Jerusalem bus schedule, a number of Abdel-Rahman's videotapes, and a pamphlet claiming responsibility for the World Trade Center bombing that also promised more bombings in the United States and in Europe.[74] Phone books found in the men's apartments had phone numbers for Yousef and for thirteen other men who had been implicated in the World Trade Center bombing. There were also phone numbers for Bin Laden and Azzam's office in Peshawar.

The Egyptians were arrested in April 1994 on charges in connection with a plot to bomb a United Nations conference in Copenhagen.[75] This was Denmark's first trial related to international terrorism. It did not go well for the prosecutors. The accused had fallen out with one another in the course of the investigation, which had stretched over two and half years. In the court room they began to fight when one accused another of being an Egyptian spy—which might have been true. And witnesses changed their stories.

The suspects freely testified about visits to Afghanistan and their support of charities supporting Arab Afghan fighters, but none of that was considered criminal activity at the time. One of the accused managed to convince the jury that he kept explosives for commercial purposes. The defense claimed that guidelines on how to mix the chemicals were simply a reminder that these were dangerous substances. The mercury that was found was not intended to be used to trigger an explosion. It was just some stuff that a

defendant had bought cheaply from a man he met on the street. A map with circles marking what the police claimed were targets had allegedly been prepared to show the sights to foreign friends who did not know Copenhagen. A hand-drawn sketch of the layout of the Israeli embassy was really a picture of a fictitious mall in the United States that their teenage sons had drawn as part of a game. The fact that one of the circles indicated a Jewish institution in Copenhagen was a pure accident. It really gave directions to an Arab housing collective in the area, they said. Arab immigrants did not live in housing collectives. Students and left-wing intellectuals favored this type of housing. The suspects were making a mockery of the trial.

The jury acquitted the men and they were released. Six weeks later, one of the men, Mohammed Shauban Mohammed Hassanein, was arrested in Melbourne, Australia. He was traveling on a Danish passport that belonged to a deceased man.[76] The Australians returned him to Denmark. It turned out that he was wanted in Greece on charges related to the attack in April 1996 on tourists in Egypt at the Luxor ruins. Eighteen Greek tourists died in the attack, which was directed by Abdel-Rahman from his prison cell in New York with the assistance of his defense lawyer, Lynne Stewart. The Danish police could not establish Hassanein's true identity, and so he was released once again. Four years later, he was captured in Pakistan. By then designated as a member of Al Qaeda, he was extradited to Egypt where he was probably executed. Seven years later, two of the Egyptians who had remained in Denmark were awarded compensation for wrongful arrest.[77]

Said Mansour stayed in Denmark and continued his activities. A journalist who came to talk to him found him sitting on a couch next to Qassim, the military deputy emir of the Egyptian *al-Gama'a*, drinking coffee.[78] The two men were not shy about confirming their close connection to the "Blind Sheikh" in New York and their admiration for his teachings. (Mansour was also listed as an unindicted co-conspirator on the indictment of the Abdel-Rahman and his men in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing.)

Two years after the coffee klatch in Copenhagen, Qassim was arrested in Croatia on his way to meet with the jihadist fighters in Bosnia. He was sent to Egypt, where it is believed he was executed. After three convictions on terrorism-related charges and many appeals, Mansour lost his Danish passport and was extradited to Morocco in January 2019. A few weeks after his arrival in Morocco, he was charged with having had a role in four coordinated suicide bombings in Casablanca in May 2003 in which thirty-three victims were killed.[79] He was convicted and sentenced to execution but in

December 2020 an appeals court converted his sentence to twenty-five years in prison. Given his age, it was a life sentence.

Al Qaeda's American bases

Bin Laden's operations in the United States grew out of the Salafi-jihadist network that had been put together in the 1980s to raise money for *jihad* and to recruit Americans to fight for the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan. Azzam, known as the "Father of the Global Jihad," toured American cities in the 1980s, lecturing at mosques and visiting charities. At one point he was accompanied by Bin Laden, his disciple from university days in Jeddah. In 1993, al-Zawahiri also traveled to the United States where he spoke at several California mosques. Ali Mohamed was his host. (See note 53.)

Charities were set up to facilitate the travel of American volunteers to fight in Afghanistan. The first was the al-Kifah center in Brooklyn, which became the base for the 1993 World Trade Center terrorist cell. Branches were established in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Tucson. The network published a magazine, *al-Jihad*. After the Brooklyn hub was unraveled, the newsletter was transferred to an affiliated center in Boston that had changed its name to CARE International. There, the newsletter appeared under a new name: *al-Hussam* ["The Sword"]. The Boston location continued its work as a fundraising front for Bin Laden until the 9/11 attacks, when it emerged that a cell in Boston had transferred money to the 9/11 hijackers.

After Azzam's death, the charities and the local networks that Abdel-Rahman had taken over came under the control of Bin Laden's new organization, Al Qaeda. Abdel-Rahman knew the American scene well: he had been issued visas for entry into the United States four times since 1986, traveling on different passports. But by 1990 he was under suspicion, and had to try harder to get back into the United States. The U.S. consular office in Cairo was aware that Abdel-Rahman was the leader of the extremist *al-Gama'a* movement and that he had been placed under house arrest by the Egyptian authorities. Rather than go to the consular office in Cairo, Abdel-Rahman went to the consular office in the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum, Sudan, where he was issued a tourist visa for the United States. (This was before computers were used to search data banks of people who should not be allowed to travel and before international lists of wanted terrorists associated with international organizations existed.)

The consular officer who authorized his visa later admitted she did not open his folder. "Now, he looked like a sweet old man. I can tell you that he did not look like a terrorist. He was a charming, little old man," she said when interviewed by the staff from the 9/11 Commission.[80]

Settled in Brooklyn, Abdel-Rahman was issued a Green Card as a religious teacher. After all, he was a graduate of the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo. The red band in his hat indicated his learned status. Belatedly the authorities also realized that he was a terrorist extremist, but once ensconced in the United States, getting him out proved to be very difficult. His visa and Green Card were rescinded in 1992 on grounds of bigamy. (Abdel-Rahman had married an American woman as soon as he arrived but he was in fact already married.) His lawyer filed an appeal and, as is customary, he was allowed to stay in the United States while the complaint was pending.[81] The appeal was still pending at the time of his arrest in connection with the World Trade Center bombing.

Abdel-Rahman's arrival in the United States precipitated a vicious struggle for control of the network of centers, mosques, and charities that law enforcement failed to detect at the time. Mustafa Shalabi, who had been in charge of the al-Kifah Center in Brooklyn, was found murdered on February 25, 1991. Shalabi had been in the Azzam camp. After his death, the al-Kifah organization came under Abdel-Rahman's unchallenged control. The Egyptians were in control. Hostile take-overs were part of how the joint venture between Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri became the base for the Al Qaeda organization.

Even now, much about the links between the Brooklyn cell and Bin Laden remains obscure. But some things we do know. There *was* a master plan. Abdel-Rahman came to the United States with the intention of repurposing the American al-Kifah network. The cell in Brooklyn was linked to Egyptian terrorist groups and their leaders, al-Zawahiri and Abdel-Rahman. (The two Egyptian groups have been seen as rivals—which they sometimes were—but they were also used to working together.) The network included Bin Laden and his two personal assistants, el-Hage and Ali Mohamed, and via these two men it drew in Abdel-Rahman and KSM and his nephew.[82] Everybody communicated with everybody else in the circle with one degree and, occasionally, two degrees of separation.

The American network was not entirely disrupted after the arrests in the wake of the 1993 bombing. The two U.S.-based operatives, Ali Mohamed and Wadih el-Hage, held on for a few years and shepherded the

1998 East Africa embassy bombing to success. Remnants of the U.S.-based network retained enough capacity to provide logistical support and funnel recruits to Afghanistan, but they managed no more attacks in the United States. Uncertainty continues to this day about the role that cells left over from the al-Kifah network in the United States may have played in providing support for the 9/11 hijackers. In 1993, Bin Laden commissioned Essam al-Ridi, an Egyptian living in the United States, to buy a used airplane in Texas and take it to Sudan.[83] The plane was supposed to have been used to freight stinger missiles that Bin Laden had bought in Sudan to Afghanistan. It was so old that it required frequent stops for refueling, and al-Ridi had to fly the airplane to Sudan via Iceland. No one on Bin Laden's staff in Sudan could operate the plane, so al-Ridi was called back to take it away and resell it. Taking off, he crashed the plane with Ali Mohamed on board. Neither man was hurt. The plan was a failure, but Al-Ridi's lasting legacy was to have provided Bin Laden with addresses of flight schools in the USA.[84]

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4
The Sudan Years

Bin Laden moved to Sudan in 1991 after negotiating with the country's leader, Omar Hassan al-Bashir and the supreme religious guide, Hassan al-Turabi. Al-Bashir and his Islamist military junta had come to power in 1989. The deal with the mercurial Sudanese leader lasted five years. The Sudan years are often described as a hiatus when Bin Laden accomplished little, trying to build his "Islamic army" and failing. A careful look at when Bin Laden started (as opposed to when he succeeded) plotting attacks against American installations and the West more broadly show that this interpretation is not accurate.

But in fact, armed global *jihad* was Bin Laden's priority, and those five years in Sudan were an exceptionally busy period of building alliances and laying the groundwork for attacks on U.S. embassies and military installations in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Nairobi, and Tanzania. Bin Laden was supporting militants in Algeria, Bosnia, Egypt, Eritrea, Somalia, Tunisia, and the Philippines and funding military instructors in training camps in Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, and East Africa.[1] And he was actively seeking out terrorist expertise wherever he could find it. One of those places was Iran, which for a period became a sleeping partner in Bin Laden's terrorism business.

The Sudanese junta was ideologically sympathetic to Al Qaeda and opened their country to Islamist extremist expatriates from everywhere, but they wanted something in exchange. So long as he built roads and farms, Bin Laden could bring his large family and entourage of hundreds of Arab Afghan fighters and their families to Khartoum.[2] Al-Zawahiri and his men from the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ) went along.

Five years later, Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri were thrown out of Sudan. Al-Bashir may have been bribed to do it. It may also be that the costs of providing sanctuary to Bin Laden and the Egyptian terrorists had become

too high after Egypt and Saudi Arabia, with the support of the United States, placed an embargo on Sudan.

Bin Laden was allowed to return to Afghanistan, this time as the guest of Mullah Omar, the Taliban's leader, but the expulsion from Sudan cost him dearly. He lost his local assets and investments, and was deprived of access to at least some, perhaps most, of his inheritance. How much he lost became clearer when Bin Laden's will was discovered among the documents released from the Abbottabad cache. In the will, he specified that twenty-nine million dollars, which he claimed to have in assets in Sudan, should be used to advance the global *jihad*.[3] The will appears to have been written as Bin Laden fled from Afghanistan in December 2001. If Bin Laden's claims were realistic, the current value of his loss might be as high as forty-two million dollars.

Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri were clearly angry about being told to leave. In 2009, news broke that al-Bashir faced an international arrest warrant for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Al-Zawahiri issued a press release on *As-Sahab* Media, Al Qaeda's press bureau, condemning al-Bashir. CNN and other Western news organizations picked up the statement. It served him right, al-Zawahiri said about al-Bashir, for having pandered to Western pressures back in 1996. Al-Bashir's war crimes in South Sudan did not bother al-Zawahiri as much as his treatment of himself and Bin Laden. Al-Bashir was guilty of expelling members of the *mujahideen* who had sought refuge there, al-Zawahiri said, above all Osama Bin Laden. Worse, al-Bashir then spread about "in an audacious lie" that they had left voluntarily and attempted to beg payment for the act "from the Saudi regime and the Americans."[4]

When Bin Laden and his entourage were thrown out, the Sudanese leaders claimed to have been affronted by the behavior of the Egyptians. Lawrence Wright writes about a gruesome incident in which al-Zawahiri ordered the drugging, raping, and execution of two teenage boys—and the videotaping of their forced confessions of spying. Allegedly, this incident motivated al-Zawahiri's expulsion, but the Sudanese regime was not averse in principle to flogging and stoning, so the issue may have been a quarrel over jurisdiction rather than a response to the ghastly nature of the punishment.[5] Or more likely, the incident was presented as a justification when the real reason was that al-Bashir could make money by getting rid of Bin Laden and his entourage. (In July 2020, the seventy-six-year-old al-Bashir and twenty-seven of his most senior officials went on trial in Khartoum for their crimes in the 1989 coup and many other crimes.[6])

Coincidentally, the Bin Laden family firm was getting big contracts with the Sudanese regime to build a new airport.[7] Using the Bin Laden name, Osama set up his own construction company, but this was as a front for his investments in terrorist operations. Steven Coll quotes Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist and friend of the Bin Laden family who visited Osama in Sudan, who described Osama as "being out of touch." Bin Laden thought he could have it all in Sudan: wives, horses, running businesses, and paying people working for him generous salaries, while at the same time doing *jihad*.[8] (Khashoggi was brutally murdered on October 2, 2018, when he went to the Saudi consulate in Istanbul to collect documents he needed for his planned marriage. The CIA would later determine that the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had ordered the killing.[9])

Above all, Bin Laden worked to integrate Arab and North African exiled militants into a coherent, global organization. The full reach of Bin Laden's activities in those years was revealed years later.[10] We now know that he was doing whatever he could to keep the troops together and to find safe havens for the Afghan Arab fighters and their families, and relocated hundreds of fighters from Afghanistan to Sudan.[11]

He had a hand in the murder attempt in Rome, donated funds to defend the killer of an extremist rabbi in New York, and gave money to set up the plotters responsible for bombing the World Trade Center in February 1993. Then, in late 1992, a new opportunity came up. Once again it was a war, this time in the former Yugoslavia, that presented an opportunity to reinvigorate the struggle and provide a base for fighters who could not return home. Thousands of volunteers went to fight in the Bosnian civil war on the Muslim side.

In 1996, the Justice Department convened a grand jury in New York to investigate Bin Laden. No announcement was made of the investigation, and a full picture of the threat posed by Bin Laden had yet to emerge. We now know that he had many other plans in the making at the time, most of which failed. So did several efforts by the U.S. government to stop him.

The United States was beginning to take notice of Bin Laden's program, but not enough to prevent two simultaneous bombings of United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998. The embassy bombings are often interpreted as delivery on a promise made six months earlier, on February 23, 1998, when Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, together with two other groups, announced the formation of a "World Islamic Front." The bombings have also been interpreted as a sign of Bin Laden's increasing

radicalization following his move from Sudan to Afghanistan in May 1996.[12] Another view is that the bombings were undertaken as retribution for secretive botched American efforts to kill Bin Laden.[13] The timeline of events does not support these hypotheses.

Bin Laden had begun to plan the embassy attacks in 1993, years before the move to Afghanistan—and before the publications of his 1996 *fatwā* declaring war against "the Americans" and the second manifesto from 1998 declaring a united "World Islamic Front" against Jews and Crusaders. In the beginning, other targets were considered, including French installations in Africa. But the planning appears to quickly have zeroed on the embassies. There were close connections between the embassy bombings in 1998 and the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. Ali Mohamed and Wadih el-Hage, the two American agents on Bin Laden's payroll, were involved in the planning of both operations.[14]

Bin Laden went to war against "the Americans" years before he openly made his declaration of war. The shift in focus from building the jihadist rapid deployment force that was planned in 1988 at the founding meeting of Al Qaeda to a new strategy of building a transnational organization outside the reach of any single state authority began when Bin Laden moved to Sudan. By 1992 and 1993, Bin Laden had an astonishing number of projects running at the same time: the events in New York described in the previous chapter, getting the office started in London, supporting armed *jihad* in Algeria, Egypt, Somalia, and Yemen, supporting a few bombings here and there, setting up businesses in Sudan, staging the training of friendly groups in Yemen and Somalia, building the infrastructure for an attack cell in East Africa, establishing diplomatic relations with Iran, moving fighters and his Pakistani office to Bosnia. The list is incomplete. Bin Laden had interests in Chechnya, Indonesia, and Kashmir. In 1991, the Abu Sayyaf Group in the southern Philippines swung into action, with money from Bin Laden.

Cover for Al Qaeda's operations was provided by one of Bin Laden's Sudan-based companies, Al-Ikhlas International. Ostensibly, the company produced honey. Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri also set up a company in 1993 in Tanzania for trading in gemstones, a useful channel for transferring assets.[15] Credit and financial transactions were arranged through Bin Laden's office in London. But not everything went smoothly.

In February 1994, Bin Laden himself was the target of an ambush in Khartoum. The Sudanese blamed the CIA and Israel. It may be that the

Saudis were responsible.[16] Bin Laden beefed up his personal security guard—trained by Ali Mohamed—and continued his activities.

Strength through alliances

Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri belonged to a generation of Sunni militants that admired the Shi'ite Iranian theocracy. Al-Zawahiri is thought to have made a connection to Iran during a visit in April 1991. He met with Imad Mughniya, the leader of Hezbollah, an Iran-supported Shi'ite movement based in Lebanon. In 1992, Bin Laden's Syrian-American business manager, Mohammed Loay Bayazid, the assistant who took notes at the founding meeting of Al Qaeda in Peshawar, was tasked with obtaining uranium with the assistance of Hezbollah, possibly in a joint effort involving the Sudanese army and Iran.[17] He did not succeed, but Al Qaeda would later renew its drive to acquire chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear material for the construction of "dirty" bombs.[18] Meanwhile, Bin Laden had other uses for his Hezbollah contacts.

Hezbollah was the industry leader in the use of suicide bombers and truck bombs. In October 1983, the group set off two coordinated truck bombings in Beirut that killed 309 U.S. and French soldiers. Bin Laden believed that the Beirut bombings had caused the United States to withdraw from the conflict in Lebanon. Bayazid signed an agreement for Al Qaeda men to be trained in bomb making in Southern Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Bin Laden was not, as his many press releases attacking the Saudi royal family by fax machine via London suggested, merely an exiled Saudi dissident who just wished his homeland to reform and be made righteous again, and to be able to return home again. He was building the organization he needed for launching the global *jihad*.

In December 1992, Al Qaeda operatives bombed two hotels in Aden, Yemen, where U.S. troops had been staying on their way to support United Nations peacekeeping personnel in Somalia. Two Austrian tourists were killed. Almost simultaneously, another group of Al Qaeda operatives was caught at Aden airport, Yemen, preparing to launch rockets at U.S. military planes. In February 1993, there followed the attack in Lower Manhattan. In June 1993, Al Qaeda operatives attempted to assassinate the Jordanian Crown Prince Abdullah. In October 1993, Somali militants shot down two American helicopters and attacked a unit of U.S. special operations forces in Mogadishu.

The insurgents took the crew hostage and killed eighteen American soldiers. (The incident was memorialized in the movie "Black Hawk Down.")

Intelligence reports later suggested that Bin Laden had considered establishing an operational base in Somalia, presumably in order to obtain better access to Indian Ocean ports.[19] From his base in Sudan, he supported the Somali Islamist fringe group, *Al Ittihad Al Islamiya* (AIAI), Arabic for "the Islamic Union."

Bin Laden was not yet in the habit of claiming credit, and the Mogadishu incident was at the time not attributed to Al Qaeda. By early 1993, however, the AIAI was receiving training and organizational and logistical support from Al Qaeda veterans. A breakaway faction, founded by some of the AIAI commanders, would become the Al Qaeda affiliate, *al-Shabaab*. Al Qaeda's Somali operation was overseen by Ubaidah al-Banshiri, the veteran loyalist who had fought with Bin Laden at the "Lion's Den." He had served as commander of the Arab Afghan force and later became Bin Laden's deputy in East Africa.[20] When he drowned in a shipwreck on Lake Victoria, Bin Laden postponed the East Africa operation. Two other trusted agents, Wadih el-Hage and Ali Mohamed, the American operatives, took over al-Banshiri's role in Kenya.

In November 1995, a car bomb was detonated at the location where U.S. military advisors were training members of the Saudi National Guard. Five Americans and two Indian military advisors were killed.[21] In the same month, Bin Laden's ally, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, bombed the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, killing seventeen people. In 1996, just one month after Bin Laden relocated to Afghanistan, a truck bomb exploded outside a residential housing complex near an army base, the Khobar Towers. Nineteen American servicemen were killed and hundreds injured. The Saudis pinned the blame on Iran and an indictment filed in early 2001 named Hezbollah as responsible, but the U.S. intelligence community now attributes the attack to Al Qaeda.[22]

Bin Laden also shipped weapons to terrorist groups in the region. Another defector, Essam al-Ridi, described Bin Laden's purchases to U.S. prosecutors: AK-47s, Rocket-Propelled-Grenade launchers (RPGs), and light machine guns were purchased from China; explosives from Pakistan and from Czechoslovakia; detonators, timers, and communications equipment from Japan and Hong Kong.[23] The weapons were sent on to fighter groups in Algeria, Eritrea, Yemen, Somalia, and Egypt. Communications equipment

went to the Sudanese. Agents were dispatched to Africa, to set up businesses that functioned as fronts and to scout for projects, and in particular to identify suitable U.S. targets in Africa.

The Egyptian *jihad*

From their base in Sudan, the two militant Egyptian groups continued to wage an insurgency in Egypt with Bin Laden's help. The back story is necessary to explain how two rival Egyptian terrorist groups ended up in Bin Laden's consortium. The radicals had by the time of their move to Sudan been battling the Egyptian authorities for more than a decade. In October 1981, an officer in the security detail of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat killed the president. The assassin was an officer and a member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Ayman al-Zawahiri's organization. Omar Abdel-Raman, the emir of *al-Gama'a* and later famous as the "Blind Sheikh" in Brooklyn was recognized as a religious authority by both groups and provided a ruling authorizing the assassination. In addition to Sadat, ten high-ranking officials died in the attack together with several international dignitaries who were observing the parade that commemorated Egypt's success in the Yom Kippur War against Israel in 1973. The terrorists, all Egyptian army officers, opposed Sadat's signing of the 1978 Egypt-Israel Peace Agreement, known as the Camp David Accords.

Thousands of arrests were made in the crackdown that followed. Among those arrested was the founding emir of the EIJ, Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Farraj. His second-in-command, also an army officer, Abbud al-Zumar, a colonel in the Egyptian army, had fought in the Six-Days War in 1967 and again in the Yom Kippur War in 1973. He too was sent to prison. Al-Zawahiri was also arrested but released without trial three years later. After his release, he went into exile, as did many members of both Egyptian militant organizations. This was how so many former Egyptian army and police officers came to be in command of Al Qaeda's military training and operations. Omar Abdel-Rahman and al-Zawahiri spent time together in the same prison after the round-up following the Sadat assassination, which goes a long way to explain their continued working relationship despite their disagreements on the finer points of the armed struggle.

The Egyptian radicals were soldiers and intellectuals. Farraj was an officer and a theoretician of armed *jihad*. While in prison, he wrote an influential jihadist manifesto. It was translated into English under the title *The Neglected Duty*, and is still readily available on jihadist websites. The tract repeats all the key elements of the revolutionary Salafi-jihadist belief system: all Muslims have a duty to fight against Israel; the creation of the Islamic State is a step towards the final victory over the infidels; the ultimate victory will be achieved through divine intervention.[24] But despite the generalities, the focus of the manifesto was squarely on Egypt. The immediate priority for the *jihad* was to take down the Egyptian regime and establish the Islamic State over its ruins. Farraj was preaching revolution in one country.[25]

The globalist agenda articulated by Bin Laden in the two manifestos from 1996 and 1998 is nowhere to be found in these early writings about the armed struggle.

Throughout the 1990s, the Egyptian groups were still focused on attacking the Egyptian regime. In 1990, the EIJ—working from its bases in Sudan—attempted to assassinate the Egyptian Minister of the Interior but instead killed the Speaker of the Parliament. In the following years, the two groups collaborated in a campaign of violence in Egypt, including the bombing of tourist sites. The aim was to cripple the tourism industry and damage the Egyptian economy. In 1992, groups of tourists were targeted with bombs, missiles, knives, and guns in downtown Cairo, at the pyramids, and on the Nile River. There were at least fifty such attacks. A thousand Egyptian policemen and tourist guides died in the strikes, along with hundreds of tourists. In one particularly gruesome attack, in November 1997, militants from *al-Gama'a* killed sixty-two tourists and their guides at the ancient site of Luxor.

The EIJ, meanwhile, focused on assassinating leading Egyptian officials, culminating in a botched attempt against the life of President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1995. The operation was allegedly financed in part by Bin Laden and carried out with the assistance of Bin Laden's Sudanese host. In November 1995, the EIJ bombed Egypt's embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan. Fourteen people died in the attack, including five Egyptian diplomats.[26] The bombing was financed, in part, by funds raised by a cell in California from charitable contributions collected in local mosques.

Ayman al-Zawahiri

Ayman al-Zawahiri was the most important Egyptian in Bin Laden's organization. He was a constant presence in Bin Laden's life for twenty-five years, if not longer. How much influence he exercised is a matter of debate. Some analysts represent him as a ponderous and ineffectual man, lacking any charisma. Others see him as a critically important influence; a man who attached himself to great men and took over when they were taken out of the game.[27] There is, however, also the view that al-Zawahiri was the thinker behind the man with the money, and exercised a strong intellectual influence on Bin Laden.

Al-Zawahiri trained as an eye surgeon and worked in clinics catering to the poor before his political life took over. He was born in Egypt in 1951 into an upper-middle-class family of doctors. His twin sister is an oncology professor in Cairo. Well-traveled, known to have made several visits to the United States, he evidently speaks English and French with some fluency.[28] Some of his brothers were involved with extremist Islamist groups. Al-Zawahiri himself allegedly joined the Muslim Brotherhood when he was fourteen, but he soon turned against this more conventional and moderate organization. Like Bin Laden, who went out of his way disown influence from the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Zawahiri has denied ever having been a member of the Brotherhood. At some stage, he formed an underground cell in 1979 that later morphed into the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.[29]

In 1980, al-Zawahiri went to Pakistan to work in a hospital in Peshawar where he treated wounded jihadist fighters brought in from Afghanistan. When he returned to Egypt a year later, he was arrested in another sweep of militants. He was in prison until 1985, and then moved to Saudi Arabia after his release. He may have met Bin Laden previously in Peshawar in 1980, in the early days of the fight against the communists in Afghanistan. They may also have met in Saudi Arabia, when al-Zawahiri went to work there. By 1988, they were close enough that al-Zawahiri was present at the founding of Al Qaeda. Afterwards, al-Zawahiri traveled widely to Copenhagen, Switzerland, and the United States.

In the early 1990s, he joined Bin Laden in Sudan from where he re-launched a terrorist campaign in Egypt. In 1996, when were expelled from Sudan and Bin Laden returned to Afghanistan, al-Zawahiri went to

Chechnya. There he was caught traveling with an invalid visa and sent to prison for six months. He got out, allegedly, by bribing the local prosecutor and guards.[30] He next joined Bin Laden in Afghanistan.

The global *jihad* was not what al-Zawahiri originally signed up for. For ideological and tactical reasons, he initially favored the "revolution in one country" strategy. In an article published in a newsletter, *Al-Mujahidin*, in 1995, shortly after the EIJ bombed the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, al-Zawahiri wrote: "Jerusalem will not be opened [conquered] until the battles in Egypt and Algeria have been won and until Cairo has been opened."[31] Al-Zawahiri's message was clear: Focus on Egypt, and deal with Israel after the revolution.[32] There was not yet any talk about attacking the "far enemy."

But at some point, al-Zawahiri changed strategy and embraced the globalist agenda. By the time he published his most important work, *Knights under the Prophet's Banner*, which first appeared in October 2001 in serialized form in a Saudi dissident newspaper based in London, *Ash-Sharq al-'Awsaṭ*, al-Zawahiri had become a globalist.[33] *Knights* is a difficult read. (Try it, reader. An online English translation is available for $26.99 at Barnes & Noble.) It is at once a detailed history of the evolution of the Salafi-jihadist movement in Egypt, a self-glorifying memoir, and a terrorist handbook. Recurrent themes are the vileness of the Egyptian state and the incompetence and spinelessness of the Muslim Brotherhood. Controversially, al-Zawahiri also claims in the book to have masterminded the assassination of Sadat. He describes his life with Bin Laden, provides guidance on guerilla tactics, and advocates what are now known as "lone wolf" style attacks: "Tracking down Americans and the Jews is not impossible. Killing them with a single bullet, a stab, or a device made up of a popular mix of explosives or hitting them with an iron rod is not impossible."[34]

Assessment of al-Zawahiri's qualities as a terrorist leader are mixed, but Farhad Khosrokhavar, a French academic and expert on Islamist extremism, describes al-Zawahiri as a "major Jihadist intellectual" and "a key ideologue of Al Qaeda."[35] I agree with Khosrokhavar: al-Zawahiri has been underestimated.

Why did the two Egyptian groups not merge? They coordinated attacks and shared the same social bases. In 1998, the emirs of both groups signed Bin Laden's United Front declaration, "*Jihad* Against Jews and Crusaders."

Personal rivalries and the narcissism of small differences kept them apart, but it hardly mattered. The two groups pursued different local tactics—one killing Egyptian government officials and the other tourists—but they were also able to work together, in the United States, in Bosnia, in Sudan, and in Afghanistan.

Some insights can be gleaned from an obscure interview conducted in Copenhagen in 1995 and published a year later in the *Middle East Report*, the print journal of the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP).[36] The interviewee was Talat Fouad Qassim, alias Abu Talal al-Qasimi, who was the military emir-in-exile of *al-Gama'a*, and also was implicated in the 1993 bombing in Lower Manhattan. Qassim was introduced in Chapter 3 at a different time, when he was sitting on another couch in Copenhagen and giving an interview to different journalists.

In the interview with the MERIP reporters, Qassim described the origins of the Islamic Group and its roots in the student politics of the 1970s. He himself had been a student activist in Minya, a governorate in Upper Egypt, and the leader of the student union at Minya University. This was one of the public universities established in Egypt in the 1960s as part of a massive expansion of the higher education system. At that time, Egyptian universities were rife with student activism but the dominant trends were Marxist, or secular nationalist and pan-Arabist rather than Salafi-jihadist. At Minya University, however, Islamists controlled the student union.

Qassim's faction started off as a study group with just nine members. The Muslim Brotherhood, they decided, had abandoned Sayyid Qutb's teachings. They saw themselves as Qutb's true heirs. The group soon moved on from study to activism. As Qassim described their tactics to the journalists, their group operated very like the Western radical student movements of the day, bombarding the authorities with demands for proper facilities for Islamic ritual practices. Men and women should be segregated in the classroom. Prayer rooms should be opened. Classes should not clash with prayer times. Then, they turned up the pressure. "The group worked to change the *minkar* (that which is forbidden) and after some destruction of university property, they got a law passed banning alcohol."[37] Many activists will recognize the tactics. This is how generations of student activists have built their protest movements, by challenging the authorities on issue after issue where they can claim the high moral ground and then escalating the demands.

Next, the activists took a step forward to mobilize for the broader revolution and formed a branch of *al-Gama'a*, the Islamic Group. In 1977 or

1978, Qassim could not remember when, they took over the student union at the university and installed Abdel-Rahman, their favorite dissident professor as spiritual advisor in the leadership (*shura*) council. "We youth did not have his knowledge."[38] As the Islamic Group started to extend its influence over student unions across Upper Egypt, it operated as a dissident youth group within the Muslim Brotherhood. Then, the students began to contemplate violent action.

The "confrontation with the state" began in earnest in 1978, Qassim told the MERIP interviewers, "with the arrests of some members after protests against Camp David [accords]." The transition from student politics to terrorism was underway. Qassim also claimed to have served in the command structure of the cell that planned Sadat's assassination. This was a problematic claim, because the EIJ claimed responsibility for the plot. In fact, both groups were in on the project, and then afterwards had a contest about who got to claim responsibility. Abdel-Rahman, who had the religious credentials, blessed the project as religiously "correct." The soldiers in the EIJ executed it. Membership of the EIJ and the Islamic Group overlapped, with brothers and cousins belonging to one or the other.

The assassination was carried out by army officers who were taking part in a military parade celebrating the capture of the Sinai in the 1973 Yom Kippur War against Israel. Qassim was not there because he had been caught up in arrests that followed a failed officers' coup in June 1981, and was in prison at the time of the assassination. He escaped during a prison transfer in 1989, and fled to Peshawar where he joined Bin Laden. While he was in Pakistan, Qassim took over formal leadership of the Islamic Group and became a "co-emir" with Abdel-Rahman. It was a religiously correct and diplomatic solution to doctrinal problem posed by Abdel-Rahman's blindness. According to their interpretation of doctrine, blind people are forbidden to take command of military operations.

The MERIP interview provides a clue to the source of the uneasy relationship between the two Egyptian groups. It may have been a matter of too many bosses but there was also disagreement on proper revolutionary practice. As Qassim explained it to the journalist, al-Zawahiri and his group focused excessively on "military operations" and failed to emphasize ideological transformation. "One must be involved in ideas and the propagation of new ideas in order to attract new adherents," he insisted.

The argument echoed a doctrinal split in far-left groups in Europe, which, in turn, recycled debates from the 1920s in the Communist

International over the "correct" Marxist-Leninist strategy and the "*putschist* error." This particular error refers to the assumption that if the head of state falls the state will collapse.[39] The alternative position, the correct one from Qassim's standpoint, was that the state itself was the enemy. All its institutions had to be torn down. Merely replacing the bosses at the top would not change things.

The emphasis on educating the Muslim masses did not mean that *al-Gama'a* abjured violence in favor of consciousness-raising. When the interviewers asked Qassim why his group murdered tourists in Egypt, he replied: "Tourism in its present form is an abomination: it is a means by which prostitution and AIDS are spread by Jewish women tourists, and it is a source of all manner of depravities, not to mention being a means of collecting information on the Islamic Movement."[40] And while Koranic jurisprudence prohibits the killing of innocent bystanders, there was a religious justification for these killings. The tourists had been warned to stay away. A religious edict—issued by Abdel-Rahman from his cell in New York City—declaring tourism "forbidden" reconciled the irreconcilable: by not obeying the "ruling," tourists became "combatants" and killing civilians not a violation of Koranic law. In fact, it was the tourists' own fault if they found themselves in the line of fire.

Qassim also gave another, more pragmatic, reason for these attacks. "Striking at such an important source of income will be major blow against the state. It does not cost us much to strike at this sector." The larger purpose, the ultimate goal, he said, was to topple the state. This was the language of Lenin, not that of Allah:

> First, we are making ongoing preparations for a military coup. The security forces don't know about these because they are preoccupied with skirmishes in the *Sa'id* [governorate]. Second, we are working in the area of mass mobilization. When the Islamic revolution happens there will be mass support to head off foreign intervention. Our commando units have acquired important experience over many years. The absence of such operations does not mean activity has stopped. The state does not know anything about these operations because of our cell formation.[41]

Qassim had moved to Copenhagen in 1990. He first married a Danish woman, but divorced when he had been granted political asylum. He then married a Moroccan woman, with whom he had four children. He became a Danish citizen and used his Danish passport to regularly travel to Peshawar

and on to Afghanistan, where militants from *al-Gama'a* were being trained for combat operations in Egypt.

In February 1993, the two Egyptian groups cooperated to put the manpower together to stage the bombing of the World Trade Center. In April 1993, the Islamic Group met in Copenhagen to set up a pan-European "*Shura* Council." Little is known about what transpired at this meeting, although Copenhagen harbored a small but busy local milieu of extremists. Qassim arranged visits to Copenhagen by both Omar Abdel-Rahman and al-Zawahiri.[42] Working with al-Zawahiri, Qassim launched a newsletter for the Egyptian militants called *al-Murabitun* ("the holy warriors"). It was printed in Algeria and Indonesia and distributed to Egypt and other countries using an inexpensive new technology, known as telephone transmitted facsimile: FAX machines. Readers were "kindly requested" to mail their questions to Ayman al-Zawahiri at a P.O. Box in Copenhagen.[43]

Holy War in Bosnia

Qassim, already a veteran of several wars, was now deployed to serve the cause on yet another battlefront. In 1992, civil war broke out in Yugoslavia between Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims. From his base in Copenhagen Qassim began to direct volunteers to fight alongside the Muslim Bosniaks. They joined an international brigade known as the Zenica brigade, so named after the location of its base. It was also known as *El Mudžahid* (transliteration of the Arabic term *mujahid*, the plural for someone who engages in armed *jihad*).[44] Bin Laden's charity, Benevolence International Foundation (BIF), a U.S. tax-exempt not-for-profit organization, financed the volunteers. BIF was registered in Illinois on March 30, 1992.

"We had no idea where it was," an Egyptian commander recalled, in an interview with a jihadist magazine, *Al-Daawah*. "When we found out that it is a part of Yugoslavia in Eastern Europe, we still had no idea how many Muslims were there and we had no idea as to how and when Islam reached there."[45] They were nevertheless ecstatic at the opportunity to bring the struggle to Europe. It was a confusion shared by many Europeans. Yugoslavia had been a communist republic since 1945. Religion was officially "abolished" and ethnic tensions suppressed. The history of Balkan Islam was largely forgotten until the republic collapsed in 1990 and the different component pieces of the Yugoslav federations began to secede and fight for

control over cities and hillsides. But the Egyptian militants decided that *jihad* in Bosnia would be a replay of the armed struggle against the communists in Afghanistan, except that this time there would be an opportunity also to teach Bosnian Muslims how to practice Islam.

Enaam Arnaout, a Syrian-American fundraiser for Bin Laden, ran BIF. He and other Al Qaeda men set up camp in Zagreb and Zenica. The camps and the relocation of BIF, Bin Laden's charity, were all part of Al Qaeda's master plan for establishing a base in Europe to provide funds and infrastructural support for the fighters.

By late 1993, the international brigade is estimated to have mustered 1,500 fighters and trained Arab volunteers as well as local Bosniaks. (Some estimates set the number as high as 5-6,000.[46]) The existence of the brigade quickly became controversial.

The war in Bosnia was expected to be a replay of the Afghan *jihad*. Veterans who had fought in Afghanistan had a new mission, and a new generation of those who missed out on the good war in Afghanistan was given an opportunity to engage in another blessed armed combat. Among the volunteers were hundreds of Afghan Arabs who had relocated from Afghanistan, and militants from Europe and North America. Mohammed al-Zawahiri, Ayman's brother, went to Albania, Bosnia, and Croatia to set up a charity to facilitate the transport of Afghan Arab fighters to join a jihadist brigade in the Bosnian civil war.

One of Bin Laden's cousins died fighting in Sarajevo. His martyrdom was eulogized by Al Qaeda's outlet, Azzam Publications, which may still be found online. The statement accused the United Nations of being in cahoots with the wicked Serbs and the Egyptians (who confusingly are on the side of the Serbs), therefore occupiers of land that the holy warriors fight to defend.[47] In this topsy-turvy eulogy, Bin Laden's Saudi cousin was a martyr in the fight against, at the same time: Egypt, the United Nations, and the Christian Serbs. (Fact check: the United Nations' peacekeepers in Bosnia were there to protect Muslims *against* the Serbs.)

Hopes for a jihadist colony in the Balkans were crushed when the 1995 Peace Agreement produced a Muslim state, the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Muslim Bosniaks were a disappointment to the jihadists. They turned to Europe rather than embracing the cause of an Islamic State, as the fundamentalists had hoped. After the Dayton Peace Accord (1995), all foreign fighters were ordered to leave Bosnia. Some went on to fight in Chechnya. Hundreds remained in Bosnia, marrying local women and

assuming new identities.[48] Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri next tried to set up a colony next door, in Albania.

Local police in Zagreb arrested Qassim, the *al-Gama'a* commander, in September 1995 when he was on his way to join the brigade. Qassim was an early example of the cosmopolitan modern jihadist. He lived with his family in Copenhagen. He fought for an Egyptian group, in Bosnia. And when he traveled, he often went through the Al Qaeda station house at a mosque in Milan, where Bin Laden, a Saudi, paid the expenses.

After his arrest, Qassim was turned over to the United States and held for interrogation on a U.S. naval vessel in the Adriatic. He was then transferred to Egypt, where it is believed that he was executed. He was probably already dead by the time the interview from Copenhagen was printed in the MERIP report in 1996.[49]

Khalid Sheikh Mohammed

After the 1993 bombing in New York, Bin Laden kept doing business with Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM) and his nephew, Ramzi Yousef. Yousef was a terrorist freelancer. After the bombing in Lower Manhattan, he agreed a contract to murder Benazir Bhutto, the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Bhutto was a Western-educated woman and therefore attracted the hatred of the fundamentalists. The plot went awry. Instead of killing the prime minister, Yousef injured himself. A second try also failed. Yousef moved on.[50]

Bin Laden thought globally. Outsourcing was part of the business plan he formed in Sudan. In June 1994, Yousef allegedly constructed a bomb on commission that was set off at the shrine of Ali al-Ridha, a venerated Shia saint, in Iran. To maximize the number of casualties, the explosion took place on the day of the Ashura, one of the holiest days for Shia Muslims. Who exactly commissioned the bombing is in dispute, but it is fairly certain that it was not Bin Laden, who was at that time trying to establish a working relationship with the Iranians.

Next up, Yousef started working on what became known as the Bojinka plot. It was an ambitious plot to blow up eleven American passenger flights departing from airports in the Far East. Yousef got help from a Southeast Asian group, *Jeemaah Islamiyah* (JI), that Bin Laden had helped fund.[51] Muhammad Jamal Khalifa, Bin Laden's longtime financier, provided Yousef with funds to recruit agents who undertook a series of attacks originating

in the Philippines.[52] In December 1994, Yousef did a test run and planted a homemade bomb on a flight from the Philippines to Tokyo. He got off at a stopover and the bomb exploded on the next leg of the flight, killing a passenger who had moved into Yousef's seat. The detonation blew a hole in the fuselage, but the flight had taken off late and was not yet at high altitudes. Therefore, the crew was able to land the plane without any further casualties.

Yousef was also planning to assassinate Pope John Paul II during the pontiff's visit to Manila in January 1995. That did not work out as planned. The cell members blew up the kitchen in Manila where they were mixing the liquid bombs for the plot to blow up transpacific aircrafts. When the fire department arrived, it was soon clear that a terrorist plot was underway, and two of the cell members were arrested. Yousef escaped. The police found a laptop in the apartment, which had uploaded plans for the attack on the Pope, and also carried information about the aircrafts plot. Two cell members were arrested and sent to the United States to stand trial. The two men, Abdul Hakin Murad and Wali Khan Amin Shah, were convicted in September 1996, and Murad sentenced to life in prison. Shah told investigators that he and Yousef had also plotted to kill President Bill Clinton during a presidential visit to the Philippines, but they had abandoned the plan because of the tight security around Clinton.

Yousef was arrested in Pakistan in February 1995 on a tip from a collaborator, who was tempted by a large bounty offered by the United States for information leading to Yousef's arrest in connection with the prosecution of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. He was extradited to the United States and convicted. The prosecution revealed his peripatetic activities, but Yousef never implicated Bin Laden and Al Qaeda in his activities. Meanwhile, Yousef's uncle kept plotting. Since 1993, KSM had been working as an engineer in Doha, Qatar, for the Ministry of Water and Electricity. Meanwhile, he was plotting terrorism on the side. In 1996, KSM was indicted in the United States in the Bojinka plot, and the FBI sent a team to Qatar to arrest him and take him to the United States to stand trial, but KSM got away. That year, he took a modified version of Yousef's aircrafts plot to Bin Laden. This time, he proposed to use hijacked aircraft to bomb high-value targets in the United States. KSM had been to the camps in Afghanistan but did not fully join up with Al Qaeda until after Bin laden approved.

The defector

In January 1996, the CIA's Counterterrorism Center set up a unit dedicated to tracking Bin Laden. Michael Scheuer, who was already running the Islamic Extremism analysis unit for the CIA, was tapped to head the new unit, which was called "The Bin Laden Issue Station" and codenamed "Alec Station." With a staff of only twelve staff members, Alec Station was quickly flooded with work. U.S. intelligence agencies had initially regarded Bin Laden as primarily a financier of extremist groups. Gradually, piecing together bits and pieces of information, the analysts of Alec Station began to suspect that he was directly involved in ordering and managing attacks.[53] Then they had a stroke of luck. One of Bin Laden's business agents walked into the U.S. embassy in Eritrea and offered to talk.[54]

Jamel Ahmad al-Fadl had lived in the United States in the mid-1980s before going to Afghanistan to fight against the communists.[55] He was present at the founding meeting of Al Qaeda in Peshawar in August 1988 and had been on Bin Laden's payroll from the start, employed as a mid-level manager but he had not been paid as much as the Egyptians in the organization. Perhaps because he was fed up, he had stolen over a hundred thousand dollars from Bin Laden.[56] Fearful of reprisals, he had left Sudan, and after some hesitation, he was prepared to throw in his lot with the U.S. government.[57]

Al-Fadl had a lot to teach the analysts at Alec Station about Al Qaeda and its inner workings.[58] His testimony was used in a grand jury indictment against Bin Laden that was filed in secret at a federal district court in Manhattan on June 10, 1998. After the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the indictment was updated. A 900-page transcript of al-Fadl's testimony was later made public.[59] He provided evidence about Bin Laden's effort to acquire uranium and his support for terrorist organizations in Yemen, Egypt, and elsewhere in North Africa. He also gave vivid descriptions of the life of the organization and gripping personal stories, including detailed accounts of smuggling AK-47 assault rifles into Egypt for use by jihadist revolutionaries in North Africa, including the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and *al-Gama'a*.[60]

The operational collaboration between the two Egyptian groups and their emirs, and between the emirs and Bin Laden should not have been in doubt any longer. Al-Fadl harbored a deep personal resentment against Al Qaeda's Egyptians. "Why is [*sic*] Egyptian people got more chance than

other people run everything?" The Egyptians called the shots in Sudan and in Peshawar. This wasn't just al-Fadl talking, he said. Other people were upset, too.[61] Al-Fadl's testimony made clear that race played a role. Al-Fadl is African and Black. People of many different nationalities worked for Bin Laden in Al Qaeda—Nigerians, Tunisians, and Sudanese like himself. But always, the Egyptians were the bosses.

The embassy bombings

At 10:30 am, on August 7, 1998, there were simultaneous bomb blasts at the U.S embassies in the capital cities of Kenya and Tanzania. In Dar es Salaam, eleven embassy employees were killed. The Nairobi embassy was in a busy section of the inner city, and casualties there were far higher. The victims were mostly local Kenyans. Of the 231 people killed, twelve were embassy employees; in total, 5,000 were wounded in the two cities. The bombing occurred exactly eight years, to the day, after the United States deployed troops to Saudi Arabia following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Bin Laden liked symbolic dates.

Within hours, the FBI dispatched agents to Kenya to investigate. The bombings were very nearly averted. In August 1997, a full year before the embassy bombings, the FBI had sent a team to Nairobi with a search warrant for el-Hage's house.[62] If the intention was to scare el-Hage, it worked. He returned home to Texas with his family, where he was arrested one month after the embassies were bombed. When he was interviewed as part of a secret grand jury investigation of Bin Laden, he claimed that he had never heard of the founder of Al Qaeda. But the FBI had learned enough about the conspiracy to identify the key men responsible for the attacks: in addition to el-Hage, these were Khalfan Khamis Mohamed, Mohammed Saddiq Odeh, and the driver of the truck carrying the bomb, Mohamed Rashed Daoud al-Owhali.

Two weeks after bombings, the United States retaliated by launching missile strikes against Bin Laden's properties in Sudan and in Afghanistan. The strikes missed Bin Laden.

The Nairobi bombing was planned as a suicide mission, but at the last minute Owhali jumped out of the truck he was driving. He was taken to hospital, arrested, and turned over to the U.S. authorities. Once in custody, Owhali soon testified that Bin Laden had masterminded the bombings.

Khalfan Khamis Mohamed was arrested in South Africa a year later. A Tanzanian, he had driven the truck in Dar es Salaam. Odeh had joined the Nairobi cell in 1994, after working with Ali Mohamed as an Al Qaeda trainer in Somalia. He left Kenya on the day of the bombing but was arrested soon after in an airport in Pakistan.[63] He too became a witness for the prosecution and his testimony helped untangle the plot.[64] The men were convicted on all charges. El-Hage was also convicted on charges of perjury and on charges related to his role in the 1993 bombing. In 2013, after a lengthy appeals process, he was sentenced to serve a life term without parole.[65] He is still in prison.

One man got away: Fazul Abdullah Mohammed (alias Harun Fazul and Fadil Harun). Fazul was from the Comoros Islands. As an African, he was an unusual figure in the top ranks of Al Qaeda, and he spoke Swahili as well as English and Arabic. Fazul had lived with el-Hage in Nairobi. When el-Hage made his hurried return to the United States, Fazul took over the management of the plot. He is thought to have built the truck bombs.

Fazul went on to an illustrious, but brief, career in Al Qaeda after the embassy bombings. He is suspected of having planned a truck bomb attack on a hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, in November 2002 in which fifteen people were killed. He allegedly also orchestrated a missile attack on a plane belonging to an Israeli tour operator that took off from the Mombasa airport on the same day.[66] (The boss for the project was probably Abu Muhammad al-Masri, who was assassinated in Teheran by Israeli agents in August 2020 together with his daughter, Bin Laden's daughter-in-law.)

The missiles missed the plane but all this raised Fazul's profile, and in February 2009 he published an autobiography under the title "The War Against Islam."[67] In the same year, Bin Laden appointed him the military commander of the Somali Al Qaeda affiliate, *al-Shabaab*.[68] Fazul was shot dead at a military checkpoint on the outskirts of Mogadishu in 2011.[69]

The United States indicted twenty-one men in the embassy bombings. The bombings brought Bin Laden's contacts in the United Kingdom to light. In September 1998, the Metropolitan Police in London arrested seven associates of Bin Laden.[70] They were the first associates of Bin Laden to be arrested in the country. The U.S. Justice Department requested the extradition of three of the men, Khalid al-Fawwaz, Adel Abdel Bari, and Ibrahim Eidarous, to stand trial on charges related to the embassy bombings. The men were members of al-Zawahiri's EIJ who had moved to London in the early 1990s.

Al-Fawwaz had been running affairs in Nairobi until the Kenyan police arrested him in 1994. He bribed his way out of prison and was then reassigned to London, where he became Bin Laden's office manager, checking the faxes, handing out cash. Bari had arrived in the United Kingdom in 1991 and applied for political asylum which he got in 1993. He and Eidarous also worked in Bin Laden's London office which was known as the Advice and Reform Committee. The two men sent out faxes taking responsibility for the 1998 bombings in the name of "The Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Two Holy Places." They sent out the faxes to media organizations the day before the bombings took place which suggested a high level of coordination.[71]

The office did the usual things that political groups do: hand out leaflets and organize things. And it organized Bin Laden's interviews with the media. Bin Laden was not yet a designated international terrorist, and these were all legal activities at the time. The men did so much more. The office worked as a message board for operatives and sent messages from Bin Laden to al-Zawahiri which explains Bin Laden's many calls to London on his satellite phone. The office disbursed funds to operatives, and sent on reports from the Kenyan cell to the head quarter in Afghanistan. They also coordinated with the EIJ colony in Albania, facilitated travel, and commissioned false passports and travel documents for operatives on the road.[72] Egyptians really did run things in Bin Laden's organization.

The three men's extradition was stalled for fifteen years by an interminable series of appeals to British and European courts. Eidarous died of leukemia in 2008. In February 2015, Bari was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison after a plea bargain in which he admitted his role in the bombings. He was released early in December 2020 and returned to the United Kingdom because of the high risk of contracting COVID-19 in American prisons. Al-Fawwaz was sentenced to life imprisonment in May 2015 after standing trial in federal court in New York city.

The embassy bombings made Bin Laden the focus of a new global counterterrorism effort led by the United Nations Security Council. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri were indicted in connection with the embassy bombings and became internationally wanted terrorists.

The capture of Ali Mohamed

Ali Mohamed, Bin Laden's longtime American fixer, was indicted separately as a co-conspirator. In 2000, he pleaded guilty to five counts of terrorism.[73]

Many documents related to his indictment and plea deal are still sealed and the details of the charges against him are unknown, but he was linked to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, the 1998 embassy bombings, and to attempts to kill "U.S. nationals employed by the military" in Saudi Arabia and Somalia.[74] At the trial, Mohamed testified that Bin Laden was closely involved in the preparation of all these terrorist plots. He also threw new light on Bin Laden's operational style.[75] Ali Mohamed confessed that he brought pictures of proposed targets to Bin Laden in Khartoum, who then personally selected the Nairobi embassy as a target and even pointed out where the truck loaded with the bomb could be driven onto the embassy grounds. He also asked Mohamed to scout other U.S. government and NGO buildings in the city, as well as the French embassy and a cultural center. In 1994, Ali Mohamed researched possible French and American targets in Somalia. According to Mohamed, the attacks were meant to punish the United States for its involvement in Somalia. It is not clear why French interests were targeted.

Mohamed thought of himself as a highly professional "sleeper" agent or "submarine." He followed a textbook strategy that he later revealed to his FBI interrogators. "Sleepers," he said, "don't wear the traditional beards and they don't pray at the mosques."[76] U.S. law enforcement had the wrong idea about sleepers and used invalid profiles of terrorists, he said, and he claimed that there were hundreds such "sleepers" in the country. (The FBI's interviews with Mohamed were described in a story published in the *New York Times* in 2000.) Mohamed was still playing games, however, when later that same year he entered a plea agreement in respect to his role in the embassy bombings and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. He did not tell everything he knew.

Patrick J. Fitzgerald, the U.S. Attorney who took part in the prosecution of Omar Abdel-Rahman and Ramzi Yousef, chased the scattered leads pointing to Ali Mohamed for years. In a statement before the 9/11 Commission he stressed that Mohamed was not a "hired gun" nor an opportunistic terrorist. He was a believer who put the practical *jihad* first. Fitzgerald's assessment of Ali Mohamed is quoted at length in Textbox 4.1.

Questions persist as to why Ali Mohamed was allowed to carry on with his activities for so long. One theory is that the FBI thought it had turned him and the government believed that he was working for the United States rather than for Bin Laden.[77] It may also be that the U.S. interrogators were duped and did not believe that Mohamed was a zealot. And yet, he did

Textbox 4.1. Al Qaeda's master spy

Patrick J. Fitzgerald was the Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Southern District of New York between 1988 and 2001. He prosecuted the men responsible for the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and was chief counsel in the prosecutions related to the 1998 bombings of the embassies in East Africa and the grand jury investigation leading to the indictment of Osama Bin Laden. Fitzgerald's assessment before the 9/11 Commission provided a chilling summary of Ali Mohamed's extraordinary life in the United States as an agent for Al Qaeda:

> The Al Qaeda network is also effective because it has great patience. [. . .] Al Qaeda will wait years to act and decades to succeed, inspired in part by their victory against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The Al Qaeda network will suffer arrests and deaths, but accept them as the cost that must be borne, and wait for the right opportunity to strike again. And Al Qaeda members have the patience to blend into a region long before an operation will take place.
>
> One of the more chilling examples of Al Qaeda's espionage was Ali Mohamed. Mohamed did not pledge *bayat* [loyalty oath] to Al Qaeda but he trained most of Al Qaeda's top leadership—including Bin Laden and al-Ayman Ayman al-Zawahiri—and most of Al Qaeda's top trainers. Mohamed taught surveillance, countersurveillance, assassinations, kidnapping, codes, ciphers, and other intelligence techniques.
>
> Mohamed surveyed the American embassy in Nairobi in 1993. And he was well trained to do it, spent seventeen years in the Egyptian military (with commando training and experience in embassy security). He left the Egyptian army to join the United States Army and was stationed at the Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg from 1986 to 1989, when he became a United States citizen. He gave some training to persons who would later carry out the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; he arranged Bin Laden's security in the Sudan in 1994 after an attempt on Bin Laden's life; and he visited the Al Qaeda cell in Kenya. From 1994 until his arrest in 1998, he lived as an American citizen in California, applying for jobs as an FBI translator and working as a security guard for a defense contractor. When he was interviewed as a potential witness in a terrorism trial in December 1994, telephone records showed that he called to the Kenyan Al Qaeda cell to let people know—and we now know he was told by Al Qaeda not to come back. At the time, he had otherwise been scheduled to conduct surveillance of American and others targets in West Africa. Mohamed is proof that Al Qaeda members often hide in plain sight.[78]

not bother to hide his Islamist views. A video from when he was at Fort Bragg (still available at YouTube) shows Ali Mohamed giving instruction in Islam to a seminar telling an expressionless audience of American military personnel that it is a duty of every Muslim to convert unbelievers and to establish Islamic law as the law of the land.[79] It may also be that the U.S. government wanted to keep Mohamed on hand to testify against Bin Laden, if and when Bin Laden was caught and put on trial in the United States. Or, perhaps, given Mohamed's history of employment by the CIA, the FBI, and the U.S. Army, putting him on trial would just have been too embarrassing for too many U.S. agencies.[80]

The Santa Clara cell

In April 2017, an obscure immigration case provided fresh information about Ali Mohamed and the Santa Clara cell that he helped set up after he arrived in the United States. The case had been brought against an Egyptian, Khaled Abu al-Dahab, who had been a member of the Santa Clara cell.

Dahab had taken a circuitous path to U.S. citizenship. He arrived in the United States in July 1986, on a tourist visa. The following month, he married a Californian woman, who was a permanent legal resident. Three years later he divorced her and married again. A few months later, he filed for permanent residency based on the new marriage. Two months later, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) approved the application. Dahab then divorced again and married a third woman. This made it three marriages in three and a half years. At that point he put in for U.S. citizenship, which was granted. However, the authorities later discovered that he had lied about his different marriages on his citizenship application forms. He had also claimed that he was in the United States at a time when he was in fact in Afghanistan. In 2017, the U.S. government had his citizenship revoked.

By the time of the denaturalization hearing in the U.S., Dahab had been out of the country for nineteen years. He had been arrested while visiting his family in Egypt, in 1998, shortly before the U.S. embassy bombings. (Around the same time Ali Mohamed was arrested in the United States.[81]) Dahab confessed to being part of an EIJ cell in Northern California and was sent to prison in Egypt. During his fifteen years in prison in Egypt, he provided information that by the time of his release emerged in the U.S. Justice Department's petition to the court for revoking his American

citizenship. In Egypt, Dahab confessed to a string of terrorism offenses. He told interrogators that he had learned to fly hang gliders in California, and then passed on the skill to recruits at a training camp in Afghanistan. Among other fanciful ideas, the EIJ planned to use commandos on hang gliders to free comrades held in an Egyptian prison.[82] He tried to learn how to pilot a helicopter. In California, he had operated a communications hub for EIJ operatives out of his Santa Clara apartment. The Egyptian authorities did not then monitor calls to and from the United States, and American intelligence agencies did not monitor calls made from the United States to Egypt. That made it possible to bypass eavesdroppers by passing messages through the California cell.

The Santa Clara cell was also in the forgery business. Dahab provided false passports to members using real passports that he obtained from Egypt's consulate in San Francisco through an elaborate scam, and provided documents, money, and other items needed to the members based in the United States and abroad. On Bin Laden's behalf, he purchased satellite phones and computers, and shipped them abroad. He worked with Ali Mohamed to facilitate al-Zawahiri's speaking tours in the United States in 1992 and again in 1995.

Dahab helped raise half a million dollars from wealthy Californian donors to support the EIJ. The information provided by Dahab confirmed long-held suspicions about the activities of the California-based conspirators. John Miller and Michael Stone wrote in their book *The Cell* (2002) that agents "felt, but couldn't prove, that some of the funds raised by al-Zawahiri on his West Coast visits, were used in the 1995 bombing of the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan."[83] The suspicion was confirmed fifteen years later in the U.S. government 's petition to revoke Dahab's citizenship.

According to a trial transcript from the Egyptian court obtained by the SITE Institute, Dahab admitted that while working out of California he "would receive '*jihad* money transfers' from Bin Laden aides and redirect them to terrorist cells around the world."[84] On one occasion, in 1993, Bin Laden gave Dahab 3,000 dollars with instructions to go to Vancouver to post bail for Essam Hafez Marzouk, another Egyptian and a member of al-Zawahiri's EIJ, who had been arrested in Canada for traveling on a false passport. Ali Mohamed, the omnipresent fixer for the two bosses, went with Dahab to Canada to bail out Marzouk. The Canadian border police stopped them, but Ali Mohamed told them that he was an FBI double agent and gave the phone number of John Zendt, his FBI handler in California. Zendt

vouched for him, and both Ali Mohamed and the suspected terrorist were released.[85]

The Santa Clara cell recruited Americans for Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. The 2017 Justice Department press release quoted from Dahab's testimony in Cairo: "Dahab told the investigators that Osama Bin Laden was eager to recruit American citizens of Middle Eastern descent because their U.S. passports could be used to facilitate international travel by Al Qaeda terrorists, and that Bin Laden personally congratulated him for this work."[86] Dahab told investigators that he recruited ten Americans to join Al Qaeda. None of them has been publicly identified.

The Albania colony

Dahab's return to Egypt was one small part of a larger setback. The EIJ went into a tailspin after a disastrous attempt to establish a jihadist commune in the Balkans. A hundred and seven members were arrested in Albania, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, and brought to trial in Egypt in 1997. The mass prosecution became known as the "returnees from Albania" trial. It was Egypt's biggest terrorism prosecution since the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981. EIJ members in Egypt, including two clandestine leaders of attack cells, were also arrested.[87] Eighty-seven people were convicted, and ten of them sentenced to death.[88]

Among those on trial was Mohammed al-Zawahiri, brother of Ayman. The men were part of a contingent of EIJ members who had attempted to find sanctuary in the Balkans during and after the Bosnian War. Many had false passports and new identities. The network maintained bank accounts in many European countries and sent small amounts, less than 2,000 dollars at a time, through the accounts to support the members. Susan Sachs, a reporter for *The New York Times*, covered the trial of the "returnees" and, drawing on documents provided to the paper by a defense attorney for some of the accused, she outlined the web of contacts between the network and Bin Laden.[89]

At one point, allegedly, Bin Laden called the leader of the cell, Ahmed Ibrahim al-Sayed al-Naggar, and offered to take the men and their families to Afghanistan. As was his practice, Bin Laden would give each family a hundred dollars a month. The timing of this offer is unclear but the EIJ network was put on trial in 1997, so it would appear that Bin Laden's offer

came at a time when he is thought to have been short on funds and short of troops. Maybe he was not as strapped for cash as is generally believed. The trial also laid bare Bin Laden's network of safe houses and a training camp in Yemen, where EIJ members took courses in the theory of armed *jihad* and the practicalities of bomb making. The Tirana-based group produced forged passports and ran an Islamic charity, which paid recruits and funneled money to the EIJ.

The wives' testimony in the Egyptian trail gave a dismal picture of life in exile. They were often left in the dark about the activities of their revolutionary husbands and suffered in isolation. One wife found out about her husband's activities by reading his diary. (This, before emails, was how a wife might discover the truth of her husband's doings.) Sachs reported that "Mrs. Hassan read her husband's diary, and realized that he was being trained to make bombs to be hidden in everything from suitcases to alarm clocks. When her husband locked the door to one room in their house, she broke in, she told investigators, and found a cache of apparently fake documents—birth certificates, university diplomas and border stamps from Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Yemen and Syria." She found one passport with her name on it and discovered she had been made an Albanian. Her husband had five different passports. The reason she knew everything, Sachs explained, quoting the testimony, was that, "[t]he wives were sitting together talking while our husbands were spending so much time in the camps."

In 1997, the Islamic Group split when one faction called for a ceasefire. Another faction retaliated by committing the terrorist attack for which the group is best known, the bloody assault at the ancient site in Luxor in which fifty-eight tourists and four Egyptian travel guides were killed. Abdel-Rahman authorized the killings from his prison cell in New York with the assistance of his defense attorney.[90]

With the jihadists, when one chapter closes a new one always opens. Ayman's brother, Muhammad al-Zawahiri, who had been tasked to set up the colony in Albania, was among the EIJ militants sentenced in 2000 to lengthy imprisonment.[91] In 2012, after the Arab Spring, when the Muslim Brotherhood won the Egyptian presidential election, and the Brotherhood's leader, Mohamed Morsi, briefly became the country's fifth President, Islamist prisoners were released from Egyptian jails. Muhammad al-Zawahiri was among them. He was reportedly rearrested in 2013 after the Muslim Brotherhood was thrown out of power, and then released again in 2016. Such are the ups and downs of Islamist militancy. During his last stint in

prison, Muhammad al-Zawahiri found himself in the company of members of the now deposed Muslim Brotherhood government and a journalist from *Al Jazeera*, Mohamed Fahmy, who had been jailed for reporting on events in Egypt. Upon his release, Fahmy was able to write about the famous men he met in prison.[92]

Defeat, and then globalization

Al-Fadl, Bin Laden's disgruntled Sudanese employee, was right: the Egyptians ran everything. Without the Egyptians, Bin Laden would not have had much of an operation. Equally, the Egyptians would not have been able to stage a comeback in the 1990s without Bin Laden.

During the years in Sudan, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Group became constituent parts of Al Qaeda. Members had come across each other, often repeatedly, in the small world of the extremist networks. If they did not meet up in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan, they might run into each other in Copenhagen or in Milan. Sometimes, one family member would join one group and another its rival.

By the time that al-Zawahiri and his opposite number in *al-Gama'a* signed Bin Laden's 1998 declaration of a united front against Jews and "crusaders," the few bosses living in exile, dependent on Bin Laden's fundraising skills, were all that was left of the two Egyptian groups. The Egyptian Islamic Jihad was officially dismantled in 2001, when al-Zawahiri merged the group into Al Qaeda. *Al-Gama'a* took a different path. The leaders renounced violence and even declared Anwar Sadat a martyr. In 2004, the Egyptian government pardoned 900 imprisoned members of the group and released them from prison.[93]

In 1996, back again in Afghanistan, Bin Laden instituted four great changes. He invited the Western media to interview him and started to speak publicly about Al Qaeda's grand strategy. He expanded Al Qaeda's geographical reach, and shifted to a networked organization with hubs in many locations. He refocused operations to target Europe and the United States. And he embraced new technology and the use of the internet to spread the message directly to followers and new recruits. To accomplish this, Bin Laden became an early adopter of new office technologies. When Agent Coleman from the FBI raided el-Hage's house in Nairobi in 1997, he found laptops, one of them an Apple PowerBook, and the manuals that went with them, as well as several printers, including a color printer, power

cords, diskettes for storing files, both floppy and hard 3 ½-inch ones, "a mouse," and A/V cassettes.[94] This was sophisticated—and expensive—equipment in 1997.

There were significant differences between these militants and the jihadist activists of recent years. Back then, in the 1990s, the men working on the operational side of Bin Laden's business tried to blend in. Operatives did not wear clothes that made then conspicuous. Their appearance and behavior were in sharp contrast to that of the often inept and always loud current generation of homegrown militants. Secrecy was important, and they did little overt proselytizing of locals. They traveled with their families, settling here and there, with financial support from Bin Laden. They were generally well educated. As Peter Bergen and Swati Pandey once observed, the men responsible for the worst terror attacks committed by Al Qaeda were not madrassa-educated ignoramuses.[95]

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5

The European Bases

Bin Laden's American networks crashed in the aftermath of the 1993 World Trade Center prosecutions. He then turned his attention to Europe. That was where the militant work force was. The focus in this chapter is on the European networks that laid the groundwork for Bin Laden's campaign against the West and the 9/11 attacks. It is a story of many failures and a few successes. The most ambitious plans involved what became known as the Millennium Campaign. The campaign was concocted by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM) and executed with the help of Al Qaeda's agents in Europe, and involved a scheme to bomb multiple targets in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East aligned to the millennium celebrations in 1999 and 2000.

Failed terrorist events rarely earn respect. That is a mistake for several reasons. One is that failed conspiracies still signal intentions and should be treated as early warning signs. Another is that the difference between success and failure can sometimes be the result of effective counterterrorism policing but often is, simply, a matter of luck. Al Qaeda was a learning machine. Every time something went off the rails, the organization regrouped and learned from the mistakes—and came back with a new and improved plan. Paying attention to the near misses helps the observer to form a picture of the evolution of the organization's capabilities and builds a fuller picture of the turning points that shaped Al Qaeda.[1]

Europe proved vulnerable to the resettlement of Islamist extremists for a number of reasons. Laws were lax and the immigration systems overburdened. The exodus of Islamist militants from North Africa and the Middle East in the 1980s and the early 1990s coincided with an upswing in refugee streams across the world. It also occurred at a time when European governments embraced international conventions on human rights to an extent not previously seen.[2] In the United Kingdom, for example, there were just

4,000 asylum applications in 1987. In 1991, there were nearly 50,000 applications, rising to over 85,000 ten years later.[3] Overloaded bureaucracies issued temporary permissions to stay that stretched on to become permanent as years rolled on. Politics also played a role, but not in the way we would expect today.

The Islamist expatriates were widely seen, by the authorities and the general public, as dissident victims escaping from crackdowns by brutal authoritarian regimes. In Europe, the militant immigrants blended in with labor migrants and other asylum seekers from Muslim countries. In 1994 alone, somewhere between 8,000 and 20,000 Algerians sought refugee status in Europe. (Statistics were poorly kept and sources vary greatly as to how many obtained legal status as refugees.[4])

The militant refugees encountered few obstacles to their claims. Jihadist revolutionaries who had been active in revolutionary movements in Egypt, Syria, and Libya, or fought in Afghanistan or Bosnia, found refuge in London, Paris, Brussels, Madrid, and Milan.[5] They slipped in illegally or arrived on tourist visas and overstayed. Some married local women and obtained legal status through their marriages. Once they obtained legal status, they traveled widely and sponsored visitors to give talks at local mosques.

This was a time when networking was physical and up close and personal. People met in brick-and-mortar hubs. When they needed to communicate without using a phone, couriers relayed messages. An infrastructure of cells, mosques, and bookstores soon emerged. The men were not all above board but many of their activities were legal, and in any case few people paid any attention outside the local Muslim communities where the militant newcomers were often less than welcome.

There were other reasons the militant refugees attracted little attention at first. Islam was a new phenomenon in Europe at the time, and few people discerned the difference between the extremists' use of the religion and the Islam that followed the labor migrants and their families to Europe. And who, in any case, was competent to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Islam? No legal route existed for suppressing extremist religion. As in the United States, most European countries did not have legislation that clearly defined acts in support of terrorism as a crime.

Europe—like the United States—had plenty of problems with terrorism coming from other directions. Britain had Irish nationalist terrorists to worry about. As the United Kingdom entered the 1990s, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its splinter groups presented the first and most serious threat

to domestic security. The IRA maintained a steady campaign throughout the 1990s. In 1990, a Member of Parliament and two soldiers were killed and a bomb detonated at the Stock Exchange in four separate bombing incidents. The next year, terrorists lobbed mortar shells at the home of Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister, and blew up a railroad station. In the eighteen months preceding the 9/11 attacks, an IRA splinter group calling itself the Real Irish Republican Army carried out six attacks that included firing rocket-propelled grenades against the offices of MI6, the British security services, in central London.

Left-wing extremism was the main concern elsewhere in Europe. The Berlin Wall came down in November 1989 but neo-Marxist terrorists invoking the name of the *Rote Arme Fraktion* (RAF) were still active. In January 1991, members of the group carried out a sniper attack on the U.S. embassy in Bonn. Three months later, they assassinated the head of the agency set up to oversee the privatization of East German state properties after the unification of East and West Germany.

In Italy, a reincarnation of the neo-Marxist Red Brigades (*Brigate Rosso*) carried out bank robberies, kidnappings, and executions of trade union leaders, leading politicians, and industrialists. The Red Brigades were organized in paramilitary cells that they called "commando groups." (Women were active and frequent members.) In 1999, a professor, Massimo D'Antona, who was a consultant to the Minister of Labor, was killed. Three years later, a labor economist and industrial relations professor, Marco Biagi, was killed by a spin-off from the Red Brigades. Hes became a target because of his work as an economic advisor to the government.[6]

For reasons of history and legal traditions, every country confronted the new terrorism on its own terms and in its own time. It is the prerogative of national courts to interpret the implementation of national law—and national obligations under international treaty and conventions. It belongs in the picture also that, initially, the small Western European countries did not think Islamist terrorism was their problem. In Europe, the coordination of policing and judicial function has historically not been part of the project for an integrated Europe.

The French and the British legal systems are fundamentally different and historically have proudly guarded their differences. French officials would publicly declare that they would use any means possible to incarcerate terrorists, and rarely found themselves second-guessed in court. British officials

in contrast, time and time again, found prosecutions derailed and stumped by evidentiary rules that make secret evidence inadmissible, and by the generally strict scrutiny by courts.[7] Algerians wanted for trial in France on terrorism charges found themselves provided with near-immunity in the United Kingdom. An unhappy outcome was a protracted custodial fight over the prosecution of terrorists that left people wanted for trial in France—and in the United States—free to carry on their activities in the United Kingdom for years.

Al Qaeda was not an illegal organization under international law until 1999 when the United Nations Security Council's Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee was established by U.N. resolution 1267 on October 15. The resolution established a procedure for the designation of "individuals and entities associated with *Al-Qaida*, wherever located." The United Nations became the unlikely leader of global legal change when the U.N. Security Council created a new international legal regime for designating individuals and organizations associated with Al Qaeda and the Taliban as international terrorists and compelled member states to freeze their assets.

In the United Kingdom, the first—of several—terrorism acts was passed in 2000, in response to the first comprehensive terrorism investigations linked to the Islamist militants. Section 1 of the act contained an expansive definition of terrorism—so expansive that critics alleged it was overly broadly drawn and challenged the act in British and European courts. It was the first of a nearly a dozen successive expansions of police powers and redefinitions of terrorism offenses under British terrorism legislation.

It was not so different in the United States. Material support for terrorism which today covers a broad range (some say too broad) of acts supportive of terrorism did not become a crime until the passage of the USA PATRIOT ACT in 2001 and the modification of Title 18 of the U.S. Code, the penal code of the federal government.

The same way the successful prosecution of the 1993 World Trade Center bombings in New York veiled the big threat behind the bombing, the failure to link a series of failed and foiled plots on four continents that Bin Laden and KSM, his chief terrorist architect, had planned to occur between 1998 and the end of 2000—the Millennium campaign, as it became known—meant that no big picture emerged of the threat. Walking history back, it can plausibly be argued that had any one of the mass casualty strikes against targets in the United States and in Europe that Al Qaeda attempted

in the 1990s been successful, the 9/11 attacks would not have happened. The build-up to this ambitious, but failed, terrorist campaign began in Europe in and around 1995. It grew from the same networks and the transnational organization that made the 9/11 attacks possible.

How much did they cooperate?

As part of the Western Jihadism Project, we have coded the ethno-national origin of Western fighters and domestic terrorists and, to the extent that this information is available, the immigration status of the offenders included in the database. We identified just over 700 people living in Western Europe related to Bin Laden's network who carried out terrorism-related acts between 1993 and the end of the year in 2001. To be included, a person had to have citizenship or a semi-permanent address in Western Europe. Their acts of terrorism may have occurred within or beyond Europe but the men were European residents. The acts varied from violent attacks (both failed and successful), the financing of terrorism to travel to training camps or fighter brigades abroad.

The analysis unequivocally shows that Bin Laden grew his network in Europe by absorbing into his organization a cadre of already radicalized militants who had settled in Europe, veteran militants from other groups and men who had gone to fight in Afghanistan or Bosnia. We found that three-quarters (75.7%) were of immigrant origin (see Table 5.1). Non-immigrant, homegrown militants made up another quarter (24%).

Table 5.1. European residents and citizens involved in Al Qaeda-sponsored conspiracies by immigration status, 1990–2001.

Native/Immigrant	N	%
Immigrant-origin	534	75.7%
Homegrown	169	24.0%
Not applicable	2	0.28%

Notes: N (Persons) = 705.
Source: Western Jihadism Project

Table 5.2. European residents and citizens involved in Al Qaeda-sponsored conspiracies by ethno-national origin, 1990–2001.

Ethnicity	N	%
Algerian	313	44.4%
Moroccan	90	12.8%
Tunisian	72	10.2%
Pakistani	40	5.7%
Egyptian	35	5%
Syrian	27	3.8%
White-European	22	3.1%
Other (< 2% of total)	88	12.5%
Unknown	18	2.6%

Notes: N (persons) = 705. 34 different ethno-national origins were identified among the perpetrators.
Source: Western Jihadism Project.

Thirty-four different ethno-national origins were recorded among the perpetrators we identified, of which 44.4% were Algerians. Close to 13% were Moroccans (see Table 5.2.). The only other group of significant size comprised Tunisians, who accounted for 10%. In total, together the three North African groups comprised two-thirds of the operatives in the 1990s.

White European converts made up only 3.1% of the cohort. There were only forty-four converts—Black or white—in all (6.2%). British-Pakistanis, who would play a larger role after 2001, during the phase of what become known as "homegrown" terrorism, were still a negligible presence, at less than 6% of the operatives. Saudis, Sudanese, Jordanians, Palestinians, and a number of other national groups each made up less than 2% of the total number. France had by far the largest number of operatives, constituting a third of the European total. These were for the most part French-Algerians or Algerians living in France.

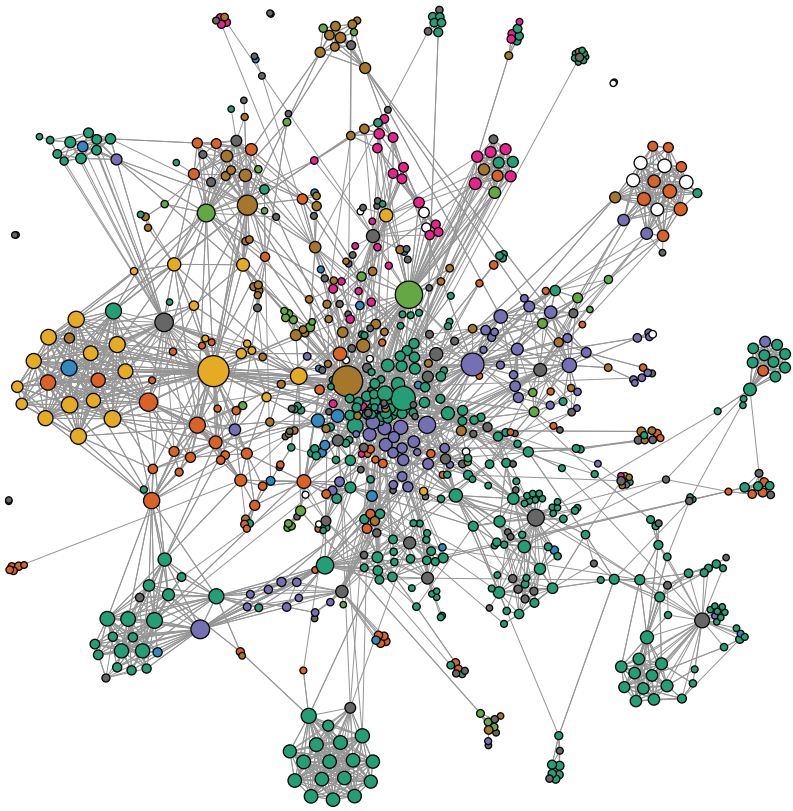
I include relational information about persons in the data collection, e.g., information about their membership of organizations, participation in conspiracies, and document inter-personal relations between terrorism offenders, the involvement of brothers and cousins, connections to preachers, and fellow companions on travels to Afghanistan (see the Appendix for further details). From the data, a picture of the social organization of the network and sub- networks in the organization emerges.

The data show that European militants belonged to a highly networked organization; so connected that it is fair to describe Al Qaeda's presence in Europe in the 1990s as the product of a single networked organization. (See Figure 5.1.) Practically all of the operatives we know about—convicted, wanted by law enforcement, or dead—based in Europe in the 1990s were connected to one highly integrated network through extended chains of interconnected persons and organizations. Of all the operatives, 94% were part of a single network of militants. Members of the network perpetrated sixty-three separate conspiracies—foiled, failed, and in rare cases, successful. Only 6% of the individuals, whom we identified as having "done something" in the period that justified their inclusion in the study had no known direct link to the larger network.

When interpreting the graph it is important to note what it shows and what it does not show. Only relationships related to criminal acts are shown. Of course, private relationships matter in the perpetuation of a contagion network.

Being part of the network does not mean that they all knew each other. But it does mean that they all knew someone else in the network. Using Christakis and Fowler's terminology, they were friends of friends or the friends' friends' friend: A was in touch with B, who knew C and D, and so on.[8] Actors left the scene because they were sent to prison or because they died, but the new recruits knew someone who knew someone else. It should be borne in mind also that every dot in the network graphic represents someone who was convicted in terrorism-related crimes, or otherwise verified as being involved in terrorism related to the jihadist project. The 6% we could not link to the network of interconnected mass of nodes could still be connected through an actor based outside Europe, whose information was not encoded because the person did not meet our inclusion criteria. They may, of course, also have had connections that were undocumented. But, all in all, the evidence does not support an argument that the network was a bottom-up rebellion by disaffected Muslim immigrants with no connection to Bin Laden's project.

A thought experiment is helpful to the interpretation of the visual representation of this real-life network. If a networked organization had spontaneously emerged from independent cliques of radicals, what would it likely look like? It would likely look like a splattergram of random unconnected clusters comprising different ethno-national groups and local groups. That



Ethnicity	Color	N	%
Algerian		313	44.4%
Moroccan		90	12.8%
Tunisian		72	10.2%
Pakistani		40	5.7%
Egyptian		35	5%
Syrian		27	3.8%
White-European		22	3.1%
Other (Ethnicity with < 2% of total)		88	12.5%
Unknown		18	2.6%
Plots/Organizations			

Figure 5.1 Network graph of pre-9/11 Europe, colored by ethno-national origin.

Notes: N (plots) = 63 conspiracies; N (organizations) = 75; N (people) = 705. Connected person nodes: 665. Nodes in unconnected dyads and larger cells: 4. True isolates person nodes: 36. Plot and organization nodes are in white. Person nodes are colored by ethno-national origin. True isolates (5%) were removed from the graphic.

Edges: Person to person, N = 4,433; Person to plot, N = 579; Person to organization, N = 357.

Source: Western Jihadism Project. All network analysis results were generated in *ORA, a social network analysis program developed by Kathleen M. Carley at Carnegie Mellon University. Network graphic created in Gephi by Rosanne Libretti.

is not what the graph shows. The network map shows an integrated and cohesive network of hundreds of operatives, who lived across Europe, spread out from Madrid to Copenhagen and from Paris to London, and extending further afield to include fighter groups in North Africa and Al Qaeda's high command in Afghanistan.

It is fair to ask about bias associated with the findings. Bias refers to systematic error introduced into the research by distorted sampling of cases. Classic instances are surveys that rely on on volunteer respondents. Those who hold strong views on the issue are more likely to agree to participate, and in this way the researcher may end up with a distorted picture of what the general population thinks. But this study is not a survey, and the data used are not the result of sampling subjects from a larger population group. When it comes to terrorism, there is no such thing as a larger population from which to draw a subgroup. Political violence is, in epidemiological terms, a rare disease. Terrorists are so rare that you cannot sample the general population to identify who becomes one.

In any case, this study is not based on a survey or a sampling procedure. The dataset used here is a compilation tracking the entire population of Western militants, who committed acts in the name of Al Qaeda and affiliated organizations and, in later years, the Islamic State.

Therefore, a different type of bias is a more relevant concern: incomplete data. We meticulously combed through public records to record, manually, data about every court case and every public announcement about a Western militant wanted for trial or presumed missing, or killed. It is likely we missed cases, but, if so, any bias from missed data would cause us to underestimate rather than exaggerate the scope of the network and the degree of integration.

Another issue that potentially introduce bias is that we are able to record only those links that have been made public as part of prosecutions and media reports. Terrorists live normal lives when they are not actively involved in illicit activities. They have wives and family members who may, or may not know what they are doing. Friends and family, cousins and neighbors, people who may have avoided convictions, are all in one way or another part of the social networks. "Gray zone" relationships may be assumed to be part of how terrorists build their social capital. However, ethical norms and privacy rules preclude collecting data about the private lives of terrorists,

even if reliable data could be identified. Again, the bias resulting from the constraints on the data collection methodology works to underestimate rather than exaggerate the degree of interconnectivity in the networks.

The London office

London became a particularly attractive location for the militant expatriates. Press freedom and a British tradition of tolerance of militant groups from former colonies gave the new cohort of immigrant jihadists room to organize. They were well aware that toleration was conditional on their willingness to observe some basic rules, including an implicit agreement that militants would not attack targets in the United Kingdom. The assumption was that if the extremists were granted sanctuary in London, they were unlikely to foul their own nest by carrying out attacks there. Another calculation was that British intelligence could better keep an eye on the extremists and their activities if they were not driven underground.

In July 1994, Bin Laden opened an office in Wembley, in West London. The office was called the Advice and Reformation Committee (ARC) and pretended to be an agency for Saudi dissidents. The office manager was Khaled al-Fawwaz, who arrived in London via Sudan fresh out of prison in Nairobi, where he had been arrested in the authorities' botched effort to unravel Bin Laden's cell there (see Chapter 4).

A year after setting up the office, sometime in 1995, al-Fawwaz inquired informally about the possibility of a grant of asylum that would permit Bin Laden to live in Britain. Information about this astonishing request was revealed by a Conservative cabinet minister, Michael Howard, who was Home Secretary at the time, in an interview in 2005.[9] Howard admitted that he had not known who Bin Laden was. He made enquiries, and as a result Bin Laden was promptly placed on the United Kingdom's "no entry" list. And yet, this was not a particularly outlandish request. Other men with similar philosophies and even with rap sheets as terrorists had been granted asylum in the United Kingdom. Since the Saudis had taken away his passport Bin Laden could have claimed to be stateless, which under British law might well have given him a claim to legal residence. Moreover, he had financial assets in London, and a number of his half-brothers and half-sisters owned properties in London and were regular visitors.

Less than a year after floating a request for asylum, in August 1996, only a few months after his hasty departure from Sudan, Bin Laden's Baker Street office issued his declaration of war on the United States, calling on all Muslims to kill Americans. This so-called *fatwā* was sent to a fax machine in the London office, from where al-Fawwaz took it to be published in the Saudi opposition newspaper, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, which had routinely published Bin Laden's writings. The title, "Declaration of War against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places," suggested that Bin Laden's main grievance was the stationing of American troops in Saudi Arabia. But Bin Laden had long moved beyond Saudi issues.

The manifesto was a mix of boasts and prophetic statements about a forthcoming revolution: "The people of Islam awakened and realized that they are the main target for the aggression of the Zionist-Crusaders alliance," it proclaimed. In fact, however, Bin Laden and Al Qaeda had hit a low point. Bin Laden's assets had been frozen in Sudan. His Egyptian allies were quarreling and breaking away. He was no longer free to travel. But rhetorically, he did not yield any ground. On the contrary, he doubled down. Muslims who like democracy and elections, Bin Laden declared, were no better than the infidel.[10] Proclaiming himself the leader of a movement for the purification of Islam, he laid out a new global program: "Today, we begin to talk, work, and discuss ways of rectifying what has befallen the Islamic World in general and the land of the two holy mosques [Saudi Arabia]." Then he went on to talk about economic policy, debt, and social inequality.

Now that he had declared war against the Americans and the "crusaders," by which he meant Israel and the United States and its allies, journalists started to pay attention. In an interview with Abdel Bari Atwan, the London-based editor of *Al-Quds Al-Arabia*, which was published in November 1996, Bin Laden explained his views. The interview was conducted in Afghanistan shortly after the release of the manifesto. Bin Laden reiterated that he was talking to the *Ummah*, the nation of Islam, "which I want to liberate from the infidels."[11] Asked if he had visited London, Bin Laden in the time-honored fashion of a practiced politician didn't answer the question. He blamed the reports that he had tried to move to an unspecified European country on people wishing to hurt his reputation. He had, in fact, visited London again. It was more than a casual visit. He allegedly stayed with al-Fawwaz, at his house in a West London suburb.[12] There is a persistent

rumor that Bin Laden was a fan of Arsenal F.C., a professional soccer team based in Islington, went to games during his three-month stay in London in 1994. Supposedly, Bin Laden saw Arsenal beat Torino, an Italian club, in the European Cup quarter-finals. The story is unsubstantiated but has become a legend.[13] It is true that Bin Laden liked soccer. Soccer matches have nevertheless been targeted on numerous occasions. Large numbers of spectators and the presence of news media make games an attractive target for militants.

Also true is that London was an important communications hub for Bin Laden's business. After Bin Laden relocated to Afghanistan, al-Fawwaz administered a Barclays bank account and credit card on his behalf. Phone records released following Bin Laden's indictment in connection with the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania showed that, over a two-year period, Bin Laden called numbers in the United Kingdom 260 times, more calls than were made to anywhere else.[14] His phone used the Inmarsat satellite network, originally created for maritime use. The phone came with 3,000 minutes of pre-paid talk-time and helped Bin Laden stay in touch with his far-flung contacts. It had been purchased in the United States by Ziyad Khaleel, an American Al Qaeda operative working with an Egyptian cell in the United States. It was bought on al-Fawwaz's instructions and using Bin Laden's account with his London bank, Barclays.[15]

The *Al-Ansar* newsletter

This was the era of faxes and print media. Mass market internet services were launched only in the late 1990s. Cell phones were not yet ubiquitous. Websites were online extensions of brick-and-mortar book stores. The new recruits walked in through the front door of a mosque or a bookstore.

A London-based newsletter, *Al-Ansar* ("The Victorious"), had a brief but spectacular run. The weekly publication in Arabic was launched in 1993. It was a co-production between Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad that was billed as a propaganda sheet for the Algerian *Groupe Islamique Armé*.[16] (The group is in English called the Armed Islamic Group but is usually referred to by the French acronym, GIA.) The newsletter reprinted

official GIA communiqués along with op-eds written by jihadist public intellectuals and theologians expounding doctrine. Similar newsletters were published out of London by other groups of exiled militants, including the Libyan *Al-Fajr* bulletin and the Egyptian *al-Mujahideen* magazine.

The *Al-Ansar* newsletter connected GIA veterans and the sponsors of the newsletter, Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, to the Arab extremist diaspora in Europe. Email was not yet widely available. Nor was bulk photocopying. The newsletter was mimeographed and delivered by couriers to local distribution cells and handed out in mosques.[17] The distribution network set up an infrastructure that blended the immigrant militants with a new generation of homegrown European Muslims.

The first editor of the newsletter was Rachid Ramda. An Algerian, Ramda was raised in a well-educated family of Berber origin. He played an important part in the GIA's terrorist campaigns in the early 1990s in Algeria and then in a series of bombings in France that became known as the Metro Bombings, although the name is somewhat misleading because targets besides the Paris Metro were hit.

In August 1992, a bomb exploded at the Air France counter in the airport in Algiers. Nine people were killed and hundreds injured. Ramda was convicted in absentia in 1993 in Algeria on charges of having orchestrated the bombing.[18] He fled to Pakistan and then moved to London, where he was granted asylum in the United Kingdom on the grounds that he would face a high risk of torture and possibly execution if he returned to Algeria.

In December 1994, a four-man GIA commando team hijacked an Air France plane in Algiers just before it took off for Paris. They killed three hostages while the plane was still on the ground. The plane was then allowed to take off, but air traffic controllers tricked the hijackers into letting it land in Marseilles, ostensibly in order to refuel. While on the ground in Marseilles, French commandos stormed the plane and shot the hijackers. It is probable that the hijackers had planned to crash the plane into the Eiffel Tower in Paris. One reason their plans were tripped up was that they could not fly and depended on the pilots to steer the hijacked plane to its destination.[19]

Ramda was arrested in London in 1995 at the request of the French authorities. When he was arrested, the police found a copy of the *al-Ansar*

newsletter that included a hand-drawn picture of an airplane flying into the Eifel Tower. The drawing would seem to confirm what investigators had suspected: namely, that the kidnappers responsible for hijacking the Air France flight had intended to crash the plane into the premier tourist attraction in Paris.

In hindsight, it was also an early warning of the jihadists' interest in using civilian aircraft as giant missiles. Roland Jacquard, a French journalist and terrorism expert, has claimed on the basis of documentation presented by the French prosecution that Bin Laden had met on several occasions with Ramda and other Algerian militants during his stay in London in 1994.[20]

Ramda ended up setting a dubious record. The British courts repeatedly refused to extradite him to France, citing concerns that the French legal system would not give him a fair trial. Frustrated by the attitude of British courts, French officials coined the epithet "Londonistan," suggesting that the city had become a jihadist heartland, an "Al Qaeda West." In December 2005, ten years after his arrest in London, Ramda was finally sent to face trial in France. The shock of the July 2005 suicide attacks on the London Underground had evidently prodded the courts to reevaluate the country's approach to the extremist. In 2007, Ramda was sentenced to life in prison in France.[21]

Years later, the disparaging description of London was popularized by Melanie Phillips, a conservative British journalist, and used by American conservatives who were critical of what they saw as the authorities' appeasement of the Islamist extremists.[22] The credit for inventing the term nevertheless goes to the French.

The Algerians

A brief detour in history back to the Algerian civil war is needed to explain the background for the presence of the Algerians in Europe and their availability for Bin Laden's project. Their prominence in the European Al Qaeda networks grew out of the Algerian civil war that broke out in 1992.

Algeria gained its independence from France in 1962. Following the example of Nasser's Egypt, Algeria first embraced the path of Arab Socialism and state-driven modernization. Reforms aimed at building a new Algerian national identity followed.[23] A decision was made to build an Arab and

Islamic national identity, purged of French influences. The secular rule imposed by the French colonial administration had eviscerated the institutions of the traditional Islamic state, so learned men from Egypt, the industry leader in Islamic theology, were brought in as guides and advisors. One of these men was Yousef al-Qaradawi, a famous Egyptian Islamist preacher associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, who has spent a lifetime in exile issuing Islamist interpretations and opinions (*fatwā* [sing.] or *fatāwā* [plu.]) about how religious law applies to contemporary problems. (Al-Qaradawi was born in 1926, two years before the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood.)

The pious identity offered up by the Brotherhood soon became popular. The beneficiary of the government's efforts to develop a new "Islamic" national identity was the local branch of the Brotherhood, which entered the political arena as *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS), known in English as the Islamic Salvation Front.

When, in 1989, Algeria adopted a new constitution that legalized political parties and provided for free elections, it was soon apparent that the secular parties had lost ground. Elections scheduled for the new institutions of representative government were staggered, and local elections held first in 1990. FIS attracted over 50% of the votes. Parliamentary elections were scheduled for the following year but facing the prospect of FIS sweeping the ballot, the government called off the elections. In January 1992, the army took control and forced out the reform-minded leadership. Six months later, members of FIS assassinated the president, Mohamed Boudiaf.[24] Algeria was plunged into a bloody civil war that lasted four years. Islamists were detained and expelled en masse. FIS was banned.

The Islamist resistance fractured into many groups and militias. In 1992, the GIA broke away from the FIS. Its leadership was largely made up of returning fighters from Afghanistan, the so-called Afghan Arabs.[25] Bin Laden—at that time based in Sudan—supported the GIA from the outset.

In January 1993, Abdelhak Layada, a hardcore jihadist and veteran from Afghanistan, became the leader of the GIA. When he was arrested, a succession of Afghan Arabs followed as emirs. An estimated 1,000 to 1,500 Afghan Arabs returnees joined the fight to topple the Algerian regime.[26] At its peak, the GIA may have mustered as many as 20,000 fighters. In August 1994, the group declared a caliphate in Algeria and, to mark the occasion, attacked the French Embassy in Algiers. Five French diplomats were killed.

In October 1994, a new emir, Djamel Zitouni took over the leadership of the GIA. He took the GIA's terrorist campaign to France.

The GIA embarked on a tactic of extreme violence. Algerian government officials and their relatives were killed for "un-Islamic behavior," as were civilians who were deemed to be "apostates." The GIA also killed several leading figures in other jihadist and Islamist groups, along with defectors from the GIA itself. The final straw was a particularly bloody killing spree conducted by the GIA against villagers during the month of Ramadan in December 1995. The details are too horrific to describe.[27]

The military regime lashed back. 100,000 people are estimated to have died in the civil war that followed.[28]

The internecine killings carried out by the GIA caused discord among the expatriates in London and in Bin Laden's camp. Some condoned the GIA's hardline approach to the killing of government officials and their families, all of whom the GIA declared complicit with the regime and therefore religiously approved targets for killing. Others objected that the tactic turned Muslims into the enemy. The leaders of the Egyptian groups, *al-Gama'a* and EIJ, and the newly formed Libyan Islamic Combat Group (LIFG) withdrew their support from the GIA after the Ramadan massacre. It was evident that the group's tactics were becoming a liability for Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. Moreover, the GIA had trouble toeing the Al Qaeda line. Its declaration of a "caliphate" in Algeria was contrary to Al Qaeda's doctrine, which called for a global *jihad* rather than a one-state solution.

Bin Laden had played a role behind the scenes in the GIA's campaign in France, but he too now distanced himself from the GIA. In June 1996, the London-based editors linked to Al Qaeda's high command suspended publication of the newsletter.[29] It had a brief second life under the editorial supervision of a fiery upstart Egyptian preacher known as Abu Hamza al-Masri (real name Mustafa Kamel Mustafa). The notorious Abu Hamza was then based in the Finsbury Park Mosque in north London, which had become a meeting point for the extremist Algerians.

In July 1996, a rival Algerian group killed Zitouni. His second-in-command, Antar Zouabri, took over. The GIA shredded large numbers of militants as a result of the discord. A new group, GSPC *Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* (GSPC)—The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat. Was officially launched in 1998. In reality, however, the GIA members in Europe and GIA members who fought with the jihadist brigade in Bosnia had begun to switch over to Bin Laden's network already in 1995, if not earlier. Hassan Hattab (alias Abu Hamza) who had been the head

of the GIA network in Europe, became the emir of the breakaway. This was essentially an organization of Algerian militants living in exile. Annali Botha, an expert on the North African jihadist organizations, estimates that Hattab took 700 guerrillas over to the GSPC with him.[30]

Committed to the doctrine of the Bin Ladenist global *jihad*, these French-Algerian militants provided Al Qaeda with a reliable network of activists spanning France, Spain, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The GIA's "Metro Bombings" became a template for Al Qaeda-directed attacks against "soft targets" in Europe.

The Algerians in Europe

On July 25, 1995, GIA militants detonated a bomb in the St. Michel RER station in central Paris. A second bomb (which failed to explode) targeted the high-speed train between Lyon and Paris. Other bombs were set at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris and other tourist attractions, a train station, and a Jewish school in Lyon (that too failed). Unexploded bombs were found in trashcans and public bathrooms. Eight people died and hundreds were injured in these Metro Bombings.

The terrorist campaign against France was run by GIA expatriates living in Europe, some in Paris and others in London.

It started with a murder. Khaled Kelkal was an Algerian who moved to Lyon with his family when he was a child. He and his older brother had both been arrested and sent to prison for street crimes. Kelkal was radicalized in prison and joined the GIA during a visit to Algeria. On 11 July 1995, Kelkal was involved in the assassination of Abdelbaki Sahraoui in his mosque in Paris. Sahraoui was a co-founder of FIS, the Muslim Brotherhood. party in Algeria, and had fled to France. The reasons for his murder were political. Sahraoui opposed the GIA and taking the violent struggle to France, and had condemned the killings of civilians committed by the GIA in Algeria.

Kelkal would be identified as one of the perpetrators of the Metro Bombings after his fingerprints were found on an unexploded bomb discovered at the track for a TGV train between Paris and Lyon.

The campaign came to an end with the death of Kelkal in a shootout with the police in September 1995. This was followed by the arrest of Rashid Ramda in London. Ramda was the financier of the campaign. The

French had strong evidence of his involvement in the Metro Bombings. His fingerprints were found on a money order for 5,000 pounds sent from the United Kingdom to the key bomb makers in Paris, Ait Ali Belkacem and Boualem Bensaid. It was a significant sum, the equivalent of 10,250 U.S. dollars at the time and about 20,000 dollars in 2020. There were also wiretaps of calls between Ramda and the bombers in Paris. (The evidence nevertheless failed to convince British authorities to extradite Ramda to stand trial in France.)[31]

Like other Algerian extremists in his cohort, Ramda had been to Afghanistan to visit the camps run by Bin Laden and his associates. Bin Laden's name crops up as a sponsor and facilitator of the GIA network, in Algeria, as well as in Bosnia, and through the office in London but no evidence has emerged that Bin Laden had a direct hand in the Metro Bombings campaign.

Starting in January 1996 followed a series of failed car bombings and robberies committed by what became known as the "Gang de Roubaix." This was a terrorist cell comprised of radicalized Algerians and French converts to Islam who had fought in Afghanistan and in Bosnia for jihadist groups. (Roubaix is a small city in northern France.)[32]

The two central figures in the gang, Lionel Dumont and Christophe Caze, were both converts to Islam. Dumont had served as a French soldier in Somalia. While there, he converted to Islam. He went on to fight in Bosnia with the jihadists, where he was sent to prison for killing a Bosnian officer. He escaped and went to Japan, where he lived under a false identity for some time. Dumont's name was added to the Al Qaeda sanctions list of the U.N. Security Council in 2003. His Security Council listing as an internationally designated terrorist describes Dumont as the co-founder, with Rachid Ramda, of the terrorist cell.[33]

The Roubaix group conducted violent robberies and attacks on French police in Northern France in 1996 and then went on a three-month long terror spree in northern France. Their activities included a failed attempt to set off a car bomb in Lille, near France's border with Belgium, in March 1996, where a meeting of the G7 heads of governments was taking place. The plot was discovered, and Caze was shot and killed in a shootout with police. Dumont escaped arrest and was initially tried in France in absentia.

Dumont was also investigated and prosecuted by the Italian authorities as a leader of militants active in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. The investigation

revealed that in Italy he had worked together with other individuals to provide logistical support to terrorist networks linked with the GIA. This included trafficking in false identity papers and receiving stolen goods.

In those days, the militants blended in with general society. They did not wear the robes and the beards that new recruits adopt today to emulate the clothes they think Muhammad and his companions wore in seventh-century Arabia. Dumont lived a double life. He married a Portuguese travel agent in Malaysia, who brought him home to meet her family in Portugal and Germany. He romanced other women on his travels and used them as cover for his plots to smuggle weapons and transfer money to operatives.

Several years later, Dumont was arrested in Germany and extradited to France to be given a second trial in the G7 bombing. In April 2007, he was sentenced to twenty-five years imprisonment.

Between 1995 and the September 11 attacks in 2001, the Algerian network in Europe was responsible for at least two dozen violent plots, including several targeting U.S. embassies. Few of the plots succeeded. Attempts to attack a large soccer stadium, *Stade de France*, in a Paris suburb were averted twice. Almost all the planned attacks involved the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), homemade and often primitive bombs.

One of the most ambitious conspiracies was known as the *Coupe du Monde* plot. It involved a series of attacks planned to coincide with the 1998 World Cup held in France. One attack was supposed to take place during a match in Marseille where the would-be bomber was supposed to rush onto the field and detonate a suicide bomb targeting the English goalkeeper. An attack on the hotel where the American soccer team was staying was also planned. The leader of the plot, Farid Melouk, a Frenchman of Algerian descent, was known to the French police and under surveillance. He had escaped arrest three years earlier in connection with the Metro Bombings. He and ten other conspirators were arrested and put on trial. Many more people were arrested in raids on Algerian networks across Europe.[34] The French authorities eventually made over a hundred arrests in connection with the plot and more or less finished off the Algerian network.

Another example of ultimately unsuccessful terrorists were two brothers, David and Jerôme Courtailler. Both were converts to Islam and former drug users. Jerôme converted to Islam at a mosque in Brighton, England, in 1996, which at that time was home to Abu Hamza al-Masri. In 1997, Abu

Hamza took control of the Finsbury Park Mosque, and turned it into a hostel for traveling jihadists. Jerôme and David lived in the basement of the mosque for a period.[35]

The brothers were linked to several Al Qaeda-led plots in Europe, including a failed plot to bomb the American embassy in Paris.[36] They went to the Khalden training camp in Afghanistan, which was a training center for Al Qaeda affiliated militants. At the camp, they met militants who would be responsible for a series of attempts to attack Western targets before and after the September 11 attacks in 2001. Their contacts included the men responsible for a plot to bomb Kleine Brogel, an airbase in Belgium, an attempt to bomb the Los Angeles airport, and the 9/11 network and the 2004 Madrid train bombings. By 2001, the brothers had moved to Rotterdam, where they began to make false passports for GSPC militants.

David was arrested on September 13, 2001, in a sweep related to the 9/11 attacks. He was sentenced to four years in prison in May 2004, convicted of helping and recruiting terrorists. Jerôme gave himself up to the Dutch authorities and served a six-year sentence on charges related to the brothers' clandestine mass production of false passports. He is believed to be living in Holland today.

In 1999, the Algerian government offered an amnesty to militants who were willing to relinquish the armed struggle. Encouraged by their emir, many returned home from their exile in Europe. However, hundreds stayed with Bin Laden and Al Qaeda.

London HQ

Several excellent books have provided detailed analyses of the scene in London and the connections to the networks in Italy and Brussels. Among the best are Lorenzo Vidino and Steve Emerson, *Al Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad* (2006), Rafaello Pantucci, *We Love Death as You Love Life* (2013), Angel Rabassa and Cheryl Benard, *Eurojihad* (2014), and Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe* (2015).[37]

Working with the data used in the graphing of the European network in Figure 5.1 above, we are able to use social network analysis techniques to identify the "chiefs" in the organization. Social network analysis relies on statistics and algorithms to assess and describe networks. One such metric

is Degree Centrality, which measures who has the most contacts with other members in the network. It is essentially a "popularity" measure. (See the Appendix for a description of the methodology.)

The top five men in the network were, in order of appearance: (1) Imad Eddin Barakat Yarkas, also known as Abu Dahdah, who was the manager of a cell in Madrid that raised funds for Bin Laden and the global *jihad* organization and also provided logistical support for the 9/11 hijackers; (2) Abu Hamza al-Masri, the very vocal Egyptian preacher and recruiter at the Finsbury Park Mosque; 3) Abu Qatada, al-Filistini, who we encountered in Chapter 1, and who specialized in writing religious edicts and providing instructions in the do's and the don'ts of the global *jihad* (he still does that but now from Jordan); (4) Essid Sami Ben Khemais, a "go-to" man in Brussels and manager of the transcontinental contact to Bin Laden; and (5) Ramzi Binalshibh, who was based in Hamburg, Germany, and wanted to be a pilot on the 9/11 mission but did not get a visa to travel to the United States. He instead became the Europe-based quartermaster for the 9/11 hijackers.

We turn in this chapter first to the London-based sheikhs. Essid Sami Ben Khemais is discussed later in this chapter. Binalshibh is discussed in Chapter 6.

Two influential men did not make the top five on our popularity list: Abu Doha and Abu Musab al-Suri. They too will be introduced in what follows. A "Who's Who" of Al Qaeda bosses based in Europe worked on the *Al-Ansar* newsletter during its brief existence. After Ramda's arrest, three veterans took over the management of the newsletter: Abu Dahdah, Abu Musab al-Suri, and Abu Qatada. Abu Doha took care of the operational side of things managing the Algerian network from London. Al-Suri, Doha and Qatada all lived in London. Abu Dahdah traveled up from Madrid for the meetings. The four men may accurately be described as the founding fathers of Al Qaeda in the West.

Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza were preachers. They rose to the top of our popularity ranking because of their public engagements. Another important figure in what became known as the "Londonistan" scene was Omar Bakri Muhammad. In the 1990s, he was attracting a cult following but was not yet as prominent as he became after 2001. Hundreds of militants went through Abu Hamza's mosque in north London. They came to make contacts and to be part of the scene, and sometimes to live at the mosque. The full significance of the mosque and Abu Hamza's activities were not apparent until after 2001.

Abu Doha and Abu Dahdah were military commanders and organizers, running operatives and managing the networks. Al-Suri was a public

intellectual writing about tactics and strategy in warfare, and also provided military training for the volunteers. Abu Qatada did his share of putting people in touch and running interference, but his main job was to be a religious authority. He has never been prosecuted. It is possible that this assessment underestimates his true involvement on the practical side.

Abu Dahdah, Abu Musab al-Suri, Abu Qatada, and the fourth man, Abu Doha, were all implicated in the 1999 Millennium bombings and the assassination of the anti-Taliban leader of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah Massoud. They also set up the bases for the 9/11 attacks, as well as the 2004 Madrid train bombing. Abu Dahdah managed the infrastructure for the 9/11 hijackers and laid the groundwork for the network that carried out the 2004 train bombings in Madrid. "*Abu*" is an honorific term and a common part of Arabic names. Literally, it means "father of." "Abu Hamza" therefore means father of Hamza. But the term has also become part of the kunyas, aliases, adopted by militants to obscure their real identities. For the sake of avoiding tiresome repetitions, the men are referred to using a simplified version without the "Abu" in what follows.

Doha is Algerian. He is usually described as having been born in 1963 but claims himself that he was born in 1966 or 1967. A man of many names, he is known also as Hider Hanani, Amar Makhlulif, and also as Rashid Bukhalfa and Didier Ajuelo or, simply as "the Doctor." He is commonly referred to as Haydar Abu Doha but he says Hanani is his real name. Nonetheless, he signs himself as Makhlulif.[38] In the British press he is referred to as "U," which is also the way he is listed in government documents.[39] American court records refer to him by his alias, Abu Doha.[40] I will refer to him here as simply as Doha.

Doha is believed to have been the operational emir of the Algerian militants in exile.[41] He arrived in the United Kingdom from France in 1993 or 1994, coinciding with the departure of large numbers of militants from Algeria. He claimed asylum on the grounds of persecution in Algeria. His exact legal status in the United Kingdom remained murky, but he evidently felt secure enough to travel to Afghanistan in 1996, where he stayed as a trainer at the Khalden camp.

Doha acted as Bin Laden's chief coordinator in Europe. He arranged transfers for people going to Khalden and other camps in Afghanistan, and assisted them when they returned. His name came up in the prosecution of cases in Germany, France, Italy, and the United States; and also in the United Kingdom, where he is thought to have managed a failed plot to use ricin to

poison commuters on the London Underground. Doha was allegedly the chief planner of the Millennium attacks and a related plan that made arrangements for another Algerian, Ahmed Ressam, to bomb the Los Angeles airport in December 1999. Ressam's statements to his interrogators implicated Doha. He was carrying Doha's phone number when he was arrested.

Doha was also wanted for trial in France, where he was accused of having orchestrated bomb plots targeting the cathedral in Strasbourg, and in Italy for his role in a plot to attack the U.S. embassy in Rome. When he appears in the entries of designated international terrorists on the U.N. Security Council's Al-Qaida sanction list, and in other lists of wanted terrorists, he is described as a senior Al Qaeda member. (An example is the listing for Saïd Arif (QDi.323), a member of a group that planned to bomb the Christmas market at the Strasbourg Cathedral in December 2000.[42])

In February 2001, Doha was arrested at Heathrow airport while trying to leave the United Kingdom. He was indicted in the United States in August 2001 on charges related to the plot against the Los Angeles airport in December 2000. After Doha's arrest, Rabah Kadre, another London-based militant who was a regular in the notorious north London Finsbury Park Mosque, took over as emir of the Algerian network in Europe. Doha was held in prison in the United Kingdom for almost a decade and placed on successive administrative orders, known as Control Orders, that confined him to house arrest.[43] He was wanted for trial in Germany, France, and Italy, and faced with an extradition request from the United States in connection with the planned bombing of the Los Angeles airport. Unable to extradite him and unable to prosecute him because of the British court's rulings and standards, British authorities released Doha. He was rearrested in 2009, pending hearings on an extradition request from Algeria. Again, he was released.

Once wanted for trial in four countries, Doha has never been prosecuted. The reasons are complicated. The United States dropped its extradition request after a witness withdrew his statements implicating Doha. Other countries could have put Doha on trial for a period of time but legal difficulties arose because the trials of accomplices in the conspiracies in which Doha was implicated had already been completed.[44] Declaring that he no longer held extremist views, he was released in 2011 and, once again, placed under house arrest.[45] Doha now lives in London, a free man.

Imad Eddin Barakat Yarkas used the alias Abu Dahdah, but he is here referred to by his real name, Yarkas. He is Syrian, born in 1963, and was a

member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood before he moved to Spain in the early 1990s, where he married a Spanish woman, Marissa. Before she converted to Islam, Marissa was an actress and had appeared in a movie directed by the Spanish director, Pedro Almodóvar. Yarkas's lifestyle was secular. He fought in Bosnia but by the early 1990s he was back in Spain, and he began to make regular visits to London to deliver money to militants and to meet with other figures in the jihadist scene in London. When in London, he stayed with Abu Qatada.

Yarkas took over the leadership of the Madrid-based Al Qaeda cell in 1995 after Abu Musab al-Suri and another Al Qaeda agent, Anwar Adnan Mohamed Saleh, also based in Spain, moved away to take up other duties. Yarkas ran a group that recruited young militants to travel to the training camps in Afghanistan and provided advance support to the 9/11 hijackers. According to a listing made by the United Nations Security Council's *Al-Qaida* Sanctions Committee, Yarkas traveled in May 2001 to Sulawesi, Indonesia, with an Indonesian Al Qaeda operator to make plans for the development of an international training camp for militants.[46]

Yarkas was arrested in Spain in November 2001 on charges of raising funds for Al Qaeda operatives and recruiting youths for training in Al Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan. He was also charged with providing logistical support for the 9/11 hijackers.[47] Seventeen other members of his cell in Madrid were indicted on related charges.[48] Evidence has recently emerged indicating that Yarkas's cell was more involved in providing logistical and financial support for the 9/11 hijackers than had originally been thought.[49]

Yarkas was initially sentenced to twenty-seven years in prison, but the Spanish Supreme Court reduced his sentence to twelve years on appeal. Although he was still in prison in 2004, when Madrid suffered a deadly series of train bombings, he is believed to have played a role in the direction of the attacks.[50] He was released from prison in May 2013 and has not been heard from since. (The networks that produced the 9/11 attacks are the topic of Chapter 6.)

Abu Musab al-Suri was born in 1958 into an Egyptian family living in Syria. He is also known as Mustapha Setmarian Nasar, but his real name is Mustafa Bin Abd al-Qadir al-Rifa'i. He is here referred to as al-Suri. Al-Suri was member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and allegedly participated in a terrorist attack in Syria (or was a member of the group responsible for the attack). In 1983, he fled to Jordan. Between 1985 and 1994 he lived on and off in Spain, where he became a citizen through marriage with a

Spanish woman, Elena Moreno, in 1987. Al-Suri met Abdullah Azzam and Osama Bin Laden in Peshawar 1988, and joined Al Qaeda soon afterwards.[51] Between 1988 and 1991, he was a trainer in one of the foreign fighter camps in Afghanistan, traveling back and forth between Spain and Afghanistan. He moved to London in 1994 to take on the job of editing the *Al-Ansar* newsletter and settled his family there. Proving, perhaps, that if you put two militants in the same office they will soon start quarreling, he left the newsletter in 1996, allegedly because of a disagreement with Qatada who refused to disown the GIA's bloody tactics in Algeria. Al-Suri then went to Afghanistan where he ran a guesthouse in Kabul and formed his own training camp for travelers seeking training in the armed struggle, the *al-Ghuraba* Camp.

Allegedly, al-Suri and Bin Laden fell out over questions about proper jihadist tactics in 1998. Al-Suri was critical of the East Africa embassy bombings in that year, and then of the attacks on Washington and New York City in 2001, which, he argued, would lead to counterstrikes that would destroy the movement. He was not alone among the Al Qaeda loyalists in raising these criticisms, and the quarrel with Bin Laden could not have been too serious. Al-Suri remained on board the Al Qaeda ship and ran training camps for Bin Laden between 1998 and 2001.[52]

Al-Suri gave lectures on military tactics and became a spokesperson for what has been called "leaderless *jihad*."[53] A video that shows him conduct a classroom exercise in jihadist military studies is still available on Internetarchive.org, with Arabic to English translations provided by a group that calls itself the "Jihad 2.0 Brigade."[54] His best-known publication is a 1,600-page document, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, which appeared online in early 2005. The document reads like an excessively long comparative Ph.D. dissertation on the evolution of terrorist tactics. He has been credited with developing the idea of "leaderless" *jihad*, but this interpretation overlooks the fact that al-Suri urged that cells should only undertake missions after getting orders to proceed from leaders of the terrorist organization. His advice was simply that to protect the rest of the organization, attack cells should operate independently in the course of action. His prescription was not that the movement should embrace anarchistic self-management by autonomous cells.

Al-Suri escaped the dragnet in Afghanistan in late 2001 and moved to Pakistan. He was arrested in Quetta in 2005 by Pakistani security forces. What happened next is murky. The assumption is that he was transferred to U.S. custody and then handed over by the United States to the Syrian government. The most recent update is that al-Suri is in the custody of the

Assad regime and held in prison in Syria. In 2012, a jihadist website reported with elation that al-Suri had been released by the Syrians and rejoined the struggle.[55] The Assad regime did release a number of jihadist extremists in their custody at the start of the civil war. The expectation was that they would join the jihadist groups fighting there, and, by strengthening the jihadist groups, divide and weaken the secularist rebels fighting against the regime.[56] But the report appears to have been false. In early 2014, both Zawahiri and Adam Gadahn, Al Qaeda's American press secretary, issued statements asking for al-Suri's release. That suggested both that he was still held by the Syrian regime and that he was alive.[57]

Al-Suri is wanted in Spain on charges related to his alleged role in the 2004 Madrid train bombings. The Spanish authorities also want to bring him to trial in connection with a 1985 bombing of a restaurant in which eighteen people were killed and over eighty injured. The bombing was attributed to a Lebanese Shia terrorist group that was then operating in Spain but the restaurant was located near a NATO air base, and American servicemen were among the victims. It is a curious detail that may explain why al-Suri's writings and lectures focus on the military art of terrorism rather than lengthy religious justifications. Today, you would not find a Sunni militant working with a Shia terrorist group.

Abu Qatada was born in Bethlehem in 1959 or 1960. He is, as his nom de guerre "al-Filistini" suggests, a Palestinian and is legally a Jordanian. He became a household name in the United Kingdom during the twenty years he lived in the country.

A graduate of the University of Jordan, Qatada is one of the few sheikhs operating in Europe who can boast a formal theological education. He may at some point have belonged to the Tabligh, a Salafi missionary group. In 1989, he moved to Peshawar in Pakistan, where he obtained a master's degree in Islamic jurisprudence and taught *sharia* law. He likes to describe himself as a "professor" but it appears that he taught at a high school.

In Peshawar, Qatada joined the expatriate community of Afghan Arabs. He also lived for a period in Kuwait from where he was expelled. In 1993, he arrived in the United Kingdom with his family, traveling on a forged passport. He sought asylum on the grounds of religious persecution and torture, and his *request* was granted in 1994. That same year, he started to work on the *al-Ansar* newsletter.[58] In 1999, while still living in London, he was convicted in Jordan on charges of having helped plan an Al Qaeda-managed bombing attack in Amman on the eve of the new millennium.

Ahmed Ressam, the Los Angeles airport bomber, was one of Qatada's disciples. Qatada and Zawahiri may have known each from their days in Peshawar during the war against the Soviet-backed secular regime in Afghanistan. One theory is that they both belonged to *Takfir Wal-Hijra*, an exclusive Salafist sect that was a radical offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. French officials have claimed that at some point Bin Laden started financing the group.[59] Qatada denied having met Ressam and Djamal Beghal, a notorious French-Algerian terrorist as well as three other French-Algerian militants living in London. It is nonetheless known that Beghal and the other Algerians studied scriptural interpretation with Qatada in London at the Four Feathers Social Club in Baker Street in London, where Qatada held forth for a period. In fact, Beghal and other students praised their time with Qatada. (The club should not be confused with a current youth club by a similar name.)

In 2002, Qatada was arrested in London on terrorism charges linked to involvement with Zacarias Moussaoui, a suspected 9/11 hijacker, and Richard Reid, the so-called shoe-bomber. He was in and out of prison for a decade but never put on trial. Reid had been his student, as were Ahmed Ressam and Zacarias Moussaoui. When the police searched Qatada's apartment, they found 170,000 British pounds in cash (the equivalent of 334,076 dollars in 2020) and 800 pounds in an envelope labeled "for the *mujahedeen* in Chechnya."[60] A Belgian court once described Qatada "as a watermark running through the whole of this case as being the mastermind, if not the commandant, of the movements propounding *jihad* in the West."[61]

The British court placed Qatada under administrative Control Orders. These curtailed his movements and imposed curfews and restrictions on whom he might meet with. He was banned from using the internet or telephone but arranged for other people to hold a phone for him and to relay messages, if necessary.[62] In 2012, a court ordered the government to prosecute him, or else have him released from house arrest and controls.[63] He was released. A new legal fight began when Theresa May, then Home Secretary, sought to have him expelled to Jordan on long-standing charges related to his alleged role in the averted bombings in Jordan that Al Qaeda had planned as part of the Millennium campaign. Qatada and his lawyers lost this battle in the British courts and then an appeal before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. In July 2013, after a twelve-year long legal battle, Qatada was deported to Jordan.

In Jordan, he was tried on charges dating back to 1999, and found not guilty. He was released in September 2014.[64] Why did the Jordanian court let him go free? From his cell, Qatada had released a letter online condemning the Islamic State for turning against Muslims: "It is shocking that they have reached a level where they have taken the people of *Jihad* to be their enemies, ascribing the attributes of *murtaddeen* (apostates) to them, assassinating their leaders, considering their wealth *Halal*."[65] Qatada remains an Al Qaeda loyalist but by the logic that an enemy of my enemy is my friend, the Jordanians may have decided that Qatada would be helpful in the fight against the Islamic State. Perhaps the Jordanian government considered that it would help national security if he were set free to preach against the Islamic State.

On October 17, 2001, following the 9/11 attacks, Qatada had been placed on the U.N. Security Council's list of sanctioned Al Qaeda-related international terrorists.[66] He is still listed as an international terrorist on the U.N. Security Council Sanctions Committee's list but lives freely in Jordan with his family and welcomes journalists and academics stopping by to talk.

Qatada is sometimes described as a hard-core jihadist, and at other times as a "moderate" Salafi-jihadist.[67] However, during his decades in London, he regularly preached in favor of the violent *jihad*. In 1995, as the GIA was embarking on a killing spree in Algeria, he issued a *fatwā* condoning the killing of Muslim "apostates," and their wives and children. In 1998, he told his followers that they were allowed to engage in takfir behaviors—behaviors forbidden by Muslim law—when living in the West, including theft and fraud, and were permitted to use Western women for sex and prostitution. A British magazine, *The Week*, published a list of his most incendiary statements, including justifications for the killing of wives and children of Egyptian government officials (1997); for the killing of Jews and Jewish children (1999); and for the killings of Americans (1999). He also celebrated the 9/11 attacks (2001, 2002).[68]

Qatada released over 200 different texts and videos online. His range is wide, from a twenty-two-page condemnation of democracy in all of its forms, to a special pink-colored instruction set, addressed to women, which lays out the "mistakes in which many women fall, even those who are religious."[69] In 2004, he incited followers in Italy to attack Rome: "Rome is a cross. The West is a cross, and Romans are the owners of the cross. Muslims' target is the West. We will split Rome open. The destruction must be carried out by the sword [a reference to armed combat in general]."[70]

He was using "Rome" as a synecdoche for the West as a whole, a standard trope in jihadist slang.

A letter he posted to a jihadist forum in 2015 highlighted Qatada's firm support for Ayman al-Zawahiri's position on the matter of the "Islamic State," opposing the declaration of a "caliphate" in 2014 by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the Iraqi terrorist who was leader of the ISIS from 2014 until his death in 2019). Qatada wrote: "This notion of a single group of individuals seizing power for themselves and then justifying it by proclaiming that they are bringing back the Islamic state needs to be severely repudiated. It has been tested throughout our history and has only brought about disasters and bloodshed."[71]

More recently, Qatada appears to have moderated his views on the sins of the Muslim Brotherhood. When Mohammed Morsi, the deposed and imprisoned president of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, died in June 2016, Qatada eulogized him warmly on the internet, writing: "Not for a moment did I doubt that he had a heart sincerely devoted to his religion and his ummah [the Muslim nation]."[72] Kind words for a former archenemy can mean several things. He may have been living up to the injunction to avoid *fitna* (division) between Muslims. He may also, for now, be committed to a "people's front" approach to gather up disenchanted Brotherhood members on the extremist fringes looking for a new political home.

Beyond "Londonistan"

London was the capital city of the global *jihad* network but other cities in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe also developed colonies of extremists. The Western Jihadism Project collects information about the hometowns of Western residents who over the years became involved in terrorist activities related to Al Qaeda and its affiliates and aligned groups. "Hometown" here refers to the city and neighborhood of residence at the time of what is technically called "mobilization," which is the point in time when the offender becomes sufficiently radicalized to undertake a terrorist-related act. This may not be the act that causes the offender to get arrested or to die but rather the first known actions in a chain of actions that eventually lead to a terrorism-related death or arrest—which in turn qualified the person for inclusion in the data collection. The data was used to identify the geo-location of these sites of recruitment and to identify the

Table 5.3. Count of terrorist actors by top-ten metro areas, 1990–2001.

Rank	City	Number of People
1	Paris	149
2	Greater London	72
3	Milan	55
4	Madrid	47
5	Brussels	31
6	Valencia	25
7	Hamburg	24
8	Bologna	23
9	Barcelona	14
10	Turin	14

Notes: Person N = 723; 36 missing information about hometowns. Non-European network members (18) residing in Europe included. 80 cities were identified as affected by jihadist extremist recruitment in the decade before the 9/11 attacks.
Source: Western Jihadism Project.

metro areas in Europe, where in the 1990s significant hubs emerged and the men who "did something" for Al Qaeda's cause were recruited. The top ten metro areas are listed in Table 5.3.

These cities were the European bases for Bin Laden's organization. At the head of the list were Paris, Greater London, and Milan. London's placement below Paris may be a surprise but is explained by the fact that, at this time, relatively few arrests had been made in London. People traveled through London to make contact but often were just passing through the hub. The new generation of British-born descendants of Pakistani immigrants had not yet made their mark and the city had not yet been the target of a serious terrorist attack. This would all soon change.

Next on the list are Madrid and Brussels, followed by another Spanish city, Valencia. The two cities were home to the Spanish network that provided logistical support for the 9/11 hijackers. Hamburg, the hometown of the four pilots responsible for the September 11 hijackings, came seventh. Eight and ninth are Bologna, Italy, and Barcelona, another Spanish city. Tenth came Turin, Italy. The prominence of the Spanish and the Italian cities is largely explained by their role as temporary homes for militants from Tunisia and Morocco, who traveled on to Afghanistan and Bosnia to participate in the armed struggle.

Next, below the top ten, came Roubaix, the suburb of the French city of Lille that was host to the eponymous "Gang de *Roubaix*." Roubaix was just a temporary base. The cell members migrated between Brussels, London, Paris, and Afghanistan, taking side trips to Rotterdam and Madrid. A decade later, small provincial and mid-sized cities in Europe would become hubs for extremists but this was still rare in the 1990s.

The Millennium attacks

After the 1998 East Africa embassy, bombings Bin Laden's network in Europe mounted an ambitious terrorist campaign that became known as the Millennium conspiracy. The plan was hatched in 1996 in Afghanistan at an Al Qaeda-run training camp that was part of a complex near Khorst set up by Bin Laden after the expulsion from Sudan. The attacks were scheduled to occur on or near January 1, 2000, to coincide with the millennium celebrations. The key element of the campaign was four separate attacks on tourist sites in Jordan: a Radisson hotel in Amman; a border crossing point between Jordan and Israel; Mount Nebo, a Christian holy site; and a site on the Jordan River where John the Baptist is said to have baptized Jesus. The plan also involved separate but coordinated bombings in Yemen, and in Europe and the United States. The plans relied on IEDs that would be delivered as car bombs, by boat, or by suicide bombers. None of the plots worked out as planned. Some were foiled or plainly failed.

The attacks were to take place around the same time but carried out by independent teams. The men had been selected in the training camps in Afghanistan drawn from the different branches of extremists who were coming together under Al Qaeda's umbrella. The planning began at roughly the same time as Bin Laden and his managers carried out the embassy bombings in East Africa and KSM worked with his hyperactive nephew, Ramzi Yousef, to coordinate a series of attacks managed out of the Philippines. The European bases provided logistical support for all of these plans. Bin Laden gave his final blessing to the Millennium project in December 1998, when Doha met with him in Kandahar, Afghanistan.[73]

The operatives recruited for the plots were drawn from the North African terrorist groups. In South Asia, Abu Sayyaf's group supplied manpower. On the Arabian Peninsula, Yemenites were the main recruits. Many

of the men had trained in Al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. Some of them had been based in London, where they took guidance from Qatada and Doha. One of the operatives was a Bostonian taxi driver named Raed Hijazi.

The Jordanian attacks were forestalled when Jordanian intelligence intercepted a call between Abu Zubaydah, the leader of the plot, and one of the operatives. The plotters were quickly rounded up. Twenty-eight men were put on trial. Six were sentenced to death, including Hijazi. Abu Zubaydah and one of the low-level co-conspirators, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, were convicted in absentia. Both men were at that time associated with *al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*, a group founded by Zarqawi with support from Al Qaeda. This group later became Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

One of the attacks was supposed to target the Los Angeles International Airport. The driver, Ahmed Ressam, intended to set off a car bomb there on New Year's Eve.[74] Ressam, an Algerian, had been recruited for this role at a training camp in Afghanistan. He had left Algeria in 1992, fleeing the civil war and then bounced around from Paris to Corsica, where he worked for a period as an agricultural laborer on a false passport that identified him as Moroccan. He was deported from Corsica to Morocco but returned to France, and from there went to Montreal, where he was redirected by a charismatic recruiter to an Al Qaeda training camp. Later, he lived on and off in Canada for three years, supporting himself by theft but also at various points he linked up with the Roubaix Gang and made another trip to Afghanistan.

Over a twelve-month period in 1998–99, Ressam trained together with the other Millennium operatives at the Khalden facility, learning to make bombs and handling a variety of weapons from machine guns to grenade launchers. His manager was Doha, who was a regular visitor to Afghanistan, traveling there from London. In late 1999, Ressam met with a support group of other Algerians based in Canada and acquired materials for constructing the bomb. On December 13, 1999, he crossed the border between Canada and the United States at a car ferry entry point in Seattle, WA, using a false identity, "Benny Norris." An alert customs official ordered a search of his car, which turned up a cache of explosives. It was determined that Ressam was heading to Los Angeles to bomb the airport there. U.S. customs officials arrested Ressam, who was found guilty on a raft of charges on April 6, 2001.

After Ressam's arrest parallel trials were conducted in the United States and in Canada, in which Ressam and three other Algerians were convicted. Ressam cooperated with the American investigators and provided evidence against Doha in London, whom he described as the mastermind of the

entire Millennium campaign. He told investigators that it was Doha who decided who would go from London to the training camps in Afghanistan. However, in the end Ressam refused to testify against Doha. Ressam was convicted and sentenced to twenty-two years in prison.[75]

One more plot involved the bombing of a U.S. navy destroyer, USS *The Sullivans*, while it was docking in Aden harbor in Yemen. That attack failed when the dinghy carrying the would-be bombers sank in the harbor. Ten months later, a similar strike, against the USS *Cole*, succeeded. The Amman bombings were also subject to a redo. In 2005, suicide bombers successfully carried out attacks against three hotels in Amman, Jordan. A pattern was established. If unsuccessful the first time, a fresh batch of operatives would try again.

On December 24, members of Kashmiri jihadist group hijacked an Indian Airlines plane and held the passengers hostage in exchange for the release of prisoners. The relationship between the hijacking and the Millennium campaign is unclear but the leader was one of the signatories to Bin Laden's 1998 declaration of United Islamic Front. One of the prisoners set free was Ahmad Omar Saeed Sheikh, a British citizen and a former student at the London School of Economics, who two years later participated in the kidnapping of Daniel Pearl, a Wall Street Journalist, and delivered him to KSM who murdered Pearl.

The Tunisians

Networks of Moroccan and Tunisian jihadist groups blended and collaborated with Doha's network of Algerians. Veteran fighters from Afghanistan, who returned to Morocco to launch a terrorist campaign there, formed the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group (MICG) in 1998. The group depended on logistic support from networks in Europe that were interwoven with the Algerian and Tunisian networks.

The Tunisian Combat Group (TGC) was formed with Bin Laden's assistance in 2000 at a meeting in Khost, Afghanistan. The members of the group lived in exile, most of them in Milan, Brussels, and in London. The TGC has been held responsible, on its own or in collaboration with other Al Qaeda affiliated networks and individuals, for organizing the recruitment of volunteers and facilitating their travel to Bin Laden's training camps. TGC members were also involved in the assassination in 2001 two days

before the 9/11 attacks of Ahmad Shah Massoud, an Afghan political figure opposed to Bin Laden and to the Taliban. (The day of Massoud's assassination by Bin Laden's men is now a national holiday in Afghanistan.)

Saifallah ben Hassine, one of the founders of the Tunisian Combat Group, moved to London with his family in 1989 after fleeing his native Tunisia. He too obtained asylum in the United Kingdom. Hassine (aka Abu Ayadh) was one of Bin Laden's top men. In the 1980s, he had been a student radical and a participant in the Islamist movement that swept across universities in Egypt and North Africa. He was sentenced to two years in prison in Tunisia in 1987 for his activities. Once out of prison, he first went to Morocco where he enrolled to study at the University of Oujda before moving on to London. There he developed close ties to Qatada and the Algerian network. He also traveled to Afghanistan, where he met up with Bin Laden. For a period he ran a guesthouse known as "Jalalabad House" for Tunisians coming to Afghanistan.

Ben Hassine's counterpart in Brussels, Tarek Maaroufi, was added to the U.N. Security Council Sanctions List in 2002.[76] He became a naturalized Belgian citizen in 1993. Although a Tunisian, at that time he associated himself with the Algerian GIA, and he played a key role in the Algerian network's campaign of violence across Europe. In 1995, he was sentenced to three years in prison in connection with his role in the Paris Metro Bombings. After his release, Maaroufi recruited the two men who killed Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance, two days before the September 11 attacks. He was rearrested in December 2001 and sentenced to seven years in prison. The Belgian authorities took away his citizenship in 2009.

Maaroufi also managed a planned attack against American soldiers stationed at the NATO airbase Kleine Brogel in Belgium. The plot was intertwined with several other plots and involved people based in Brussels, Paris, and Rotterdam. The operatives included a Tunisian soccer player, Nizar Trabelsi, who had played professionally for a German team, and the Algerian, Djamel Beghal. Unusually for the time, the perpetrators were supposed to kill themselves in the attack.

Trabelsi was a veteran of the Al Qaeda-run training camps and allegedly had met Bin Laden several times. He later testified that Bin Laden had asked him to become a suicide bomber. Bin Laden liked to play soccer and may well have taken an interest in the former professional player. "I was supposed to go alone in a van. The bomb was behind me," Trabelsi told the Brussels

court in 2003 in the airbase trial. It is not clear if courage failed him or why the plot failed. After the NATO plot failed, Trabelsi became the designated suicide bomber in a plot to attack the American embassy in Paris in 2001. However, he had a change of mind. By the time of the trial, Trabelsi had renounced violence and disapproved of the 9/11 attacks.[77] Trabelsi was extradited to the United States in 2013 to be tried on charges filed against him in 2006 in connection with the attack.[78] The prosecution was put on hold when a Belgian Appeals Court decided that he could not be tried on charges related to acts for which he had already been convicted in Belgium, and that this would constitute a violation of the conditions for his extradition to the United States.[79]

Maaroufi was also involved in the foiled attempt to attack the U.S. embassy in Rome and a conspiracy to plant bombs in the Milan subway system. One of his contacts in Europe was Imad Yarkas, the Spanish coordinator of the 9/11 hijackers. Another was Anwar Shaaban, the Al Qaeda station head in Milan and titulary imam at the Islamic Cultural Institute in Milan. Maaroufi also had frequent contacts with Qatada and Doha in London.[80]

Essid Sami Ben Khemais was born in 1960 in Tunisia—or perhaps he was born in 1968. Both years are often reported as his year of birth. He is known both as Essid Sami and as Ben (or Bin) Khemais, but is here referred to here as Sami Essid. He emigrated to Italy without papers in 1998, and became the head of the Al Qaeda cell at the Milan-based Islamic Cultural Center, the mosque previously led by Anwar Shaaban. In the 1990s, the mosque was the hub for funneling foreign fighters to the jihadist brigade in Bosnia and a stopover for travelers working in the global *jihad*. Yousef Ramzi stopped over on his travels back and forth from New York on his mission to build the bomb used in the 1993 World Trade center attack. Over the years, the Milan mosque has been tied to the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, the travel of militants between Al Qaeda's camps in Afghanistan and destinations in Europe and North America, and the plot to attack the United States on September 11, 2001. The officials responsible for tracking Al Qaeda's financial transactions in the U.S. Treasury once characterized it as "Al Qaeda's station house" in Europe.[81] The Italian authorities shut it down after 9/11. In 2008, the mosque reopened under new leadership.

Sami Essid worked closely with Tarek Maaroufi in Brussels, and was in regular contact with the co-workers in Spain in Abu Dahdah's cell.[82] Sami Essid was arrested in April 2001 on charges related to the failed plot to bomb

the U.S. embassy in Rome. He was convicted of trafficking in arms, explosives, and chemicals. His many other alleged crimes related to the provision of false papers, money transfers, money laundering, and, separately, a beating administered to a Muslim intellectual in the idyllic tourist town of Como. In addition to the Strasbourg Cathedral attack, his profile on the U.N. Security Council's Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee's list includes charges of passing stolen and counterfeit goods, planning chemical attacks, and the manufacture of stolen documents and false passports. It also lists his connections to terrorist organizations and to thirteen individual terrorists in Algeria (GIA), Germany (the Frankfurt cell and Trabelsi), Spain (Abu Dahdah), and the Los Angeles Airport bomber (Ressam), and the 2004 Madrid bombing and to contacts with Doha and Qatada in the United Kingdom.

The *Chicago Tribune* had a journalist in court in Milan in October 2001 during Sami Essid's first trial when recordings from wiretaps conducted by the Italian police were played in court. On the tape, the suspects were heard discussing how to turn a standard kitchen pressure cooker into a bomb. A partial transcript was published in the Tribune:

> "First you have to fill it up with tin, with aluminum, and then you put the tricks in and close it with India rubber and then—boom!" Mohammed Ben Heni Lased tells Ben Khemais [Sami Essid] in a conversation last March. Lased, a 32-year-old Libyan who lives in Munich, was picked up by German police last week. "I'd like to learn how to use the drug," Ben Khemais replies, apparently referring to some kind of homemade chemical weapon. "I'd like to see what effect it has when someone breathes it in. The Libyan has the formula; he's a chemistry professor....They have created a way to combine the fumes [of the drug] with the explosive. It's easy, but I don't know how to make it."[83]

The journalist from the *Tribune* was skeptical about the seriousness of all this chatter. We now know that this is how jihadist terrorists talk among themselves when they want to talk shop and maybe brag, but also try to deceive eavesdroppers.

Strasbourg Christmas market bombing

The last failed attack, in December 2000, involved a small and closely connected network of Algerian operatives. They intended to produce mass civilian causalities by detonating a bomb at Christmas time in front of

Strasbourg Cathedral. To avoid alerting French authorities, they assembled the bomb in Germany, across the border from the intended target. The plot was foiled when the German police arrested two Iraqis, a Frenchman, and an Algerian in Frankfurt on December 25 and 26. It became clear they were plotting to bomb the busy square in front of the cathedral on New Year's Eve. The men were in possession of a map of the city and a video showing footage of the market. They also had pressure cookers rigged to detonate as bombs.

Several of the men involved in the Strasbourg plot had lived for a period in the basement of London's Finsbury Park Mosque. Four were French-Algerians who had attended Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan: Slimane Khalfaoui, Yacine Akhnouche, Rabah Kadre, and Mohamed Bensakria.

Bensakria, a Milan-based member of the cell, was considered one of Bin Laden's lieutenants in Europe. Akhnouche and Bensakria were brothers-in-law. Some of the plotters were convicted in Germany in March 2003 and received prison terms ranging from ten to twelve years. The French authorities indicted ten men, among them Bensakria, who was extradited from Spain to stand trial in France in the summer of 2001. Akhnouche received an eight-year sentence. Khalfaoui and Bensakria both received ten-year sentences. Mirouane Ben Ahmed, also a French-Algerian, fled to Spain to avoid arrest. There he joined a local GSPC cell and went on to fight in Chechnya, but he was detained after traveling to the United Kingdom and eventually extradited to France.

Rabah Kadre, who took over running the Algerian network in Europe from Doha, was also convicted in France of involvement in the Strasbourg plot. Earlier, in November 2002, he had been arrested in London and charged in connection with a foiled plot to use ricin, a poison developed from castor beans, to kill commuters in the London Underground. Two other men were also arrested and charged in the plot, but the prosecution fell apart and the charges were eventually withdrawn. However, Kadre was found guilty of using a false passport and held in prison in the United Kingdom until 2006. He was convicted in absentia in France in 2004 on charges of having orchestrated the Strasbourg bombing. After serving out his sentence in France, Kadre was deported to Algeria.

Saïd, arif, a former Algerian army officer, left France and went to fight in Chechnya—allegedly together with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who later became the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq. Arif moved on to join Al Qaeda in

Afghanistan. He was arrested in Syria in 2001 and sent to be tried in France as part of a large trial connected to the so-called "Chechen Network." This network had plans to bomb the Eiffel Tower and other targets in France. Arif was released from prison in 2011 and placed under house arrest. He escaped from the monitors and went to Syria to fight for the Nusra Front in 2013. It is thought that he has since died.

Next up was the plot to attack the U.S. embassy in Paris involving Trabelsi. This plot unraveled when Djamel Beghal was arrested, on July 28, 2001, at Dubai International Airport in the United Arab Emirates as he transferred from a flight from Pakistan to a flight to Europe.[84] He was traveling on a forged French passport. Beghal confessed to the UAE authorities that he was conspiring to bomb the U.S. embassy in Paris. He would later retract that part of his statement, claiming it had been made under duress. Nevertheless, after he was extradited to France, in October 2001, he told the investigating magistrate that he had visited Bin Laden in Afghanistan and then planned the foiled suicide bomb attack.[85]

Beghal, also an Algerian, was married to a French woman and had become a French citizen through his marriage. For unknown reasons, he moved to Leicester, two hours' drive north of London. There, he was a regular at the *Taqwa* mosque (Mosque of Piety). At the mosque he made contact with Brahim Bemerzouga and Baghdad Meziane. The two men, illegal immigrants, were both followers of the London-based clerics, Abu Hamza al-Masri and Qatada.[86] Beghal's arrest in the UAE prompted a British investigation, which led to the unraveling of the Leicester cell. It was the first such major investigation in the United Kingdom and resulted in seventeen people being jailed for fraud. Seven more men were detained by the Immigration Service.[87] The group was found to have engaged in credit card fraud on a massive scale and stolen 200,000 British pounds for "the struggle" (roughly the equivalent of 380,000 dollars in 2020).[88]

But this was much more than a fundraising conspiracy. Beghal had an impressive list of contacts. He was communicating with, among other notorious terrorists: Ahmed Ressam, who was caught attempting to bomb the Los Angeles International Airport New Year's Eve in 1999; the Courtailler brothers, who were part of the Roubaix Gang and caught trying to bomb the U.S. embassy in Paris (a plot concocted by KSM); and Zacarias Moussaoui, who is often described as "the twentieth hijacker." Moussaoui was arrested before the 9/11 attacks. His erratic behavior at a flight school in Norman, Oklahoma, had raised suspicions, which led to his arrest.

Moussaoui was also a KSM recruit, who had passed through the hub in London on his way to Afghanistan in 1998.

Other notorious members of Bengal's network were an Al Qaeda recruiter, Abdulaziz Benyaich, and Jamal Zougam.[89] The latter was responsible for the operational planning of the Madrid train bombing in 2004. Beghal's brother-in-law, Johan Bonté was part of the plot to bomb the embassy in Paris. He was a French citizen who radicalized and converted to Islam, at the age of seventeen, when he was staying with Beghal in Leicester. One of the Courtailler brothers, David, also became radicalized after meeting Beghal in London. David was just twenty-one years old.

In 2005, Beghal was sentenced to ten years in prison. While in prison, he became a mentor to two young men, Amedy Coulibaly and Chérif Kouachi.[90] In January 2015, the two were joined by Chérif's brother, Saïd Kouachi, in shooting attacks directed against the editorial office of *Charlie Hebdo* and a Jewish supermarket on the outskirts of Paris in which seventeen people were killed. During the trial of another terrorist, in 2018, responsible for the November 2015 attacks in Paris, a photo on a cell phone belonging one of the participants showed Farid Melouk playing soccer with one of the Kouachi brothers and Beghal, who was by then out of prison, on Melouk's farm in Auvergne.[91] The photo brought together two generations of French terrorists and linked the perpetrators of the two devastating terrorist attacks that occurred in Paris in 2015 through their shared connection to a notorious veteran.

The assassination of Ahmad Shah Massoud

The role of a small group of men in Hamburg, Germany, in the 9/11 attack is well known. Less well known is that a much wider European network was mobilized as part of Bin Laden's grand design for delivering a decisive blow to the United States, a blow that he expected would change everything. it did but not the way he expected.

Two days before the 9/11 attacks an assassination took place in Afghanistan. It was carried out on the orders of Bin Laden and organized by the European network. The timing was carefully planned. The victim was Ahmad Shah Massoud, an Afghan warlord and ethnic Tajik, who by virtue of being strongly anti-Taliban had become an ally of the West in the ongoing power struggles in Afghanistan.

The assassins, selected for the task by Bin Laden himself, were two Tunisians living in Brussels. They had been radicalized while attending a mosque in Molenbeek, a Brussels neighborhood that is famous today for its role in producing the militants who were responsible for a string of attacks in France and Belgium in 2015 and 2016.

Bin Laden and his chief military commander, Muhammed Atef, chose the two men for the operation while they attended a training camp in Afghanistan. On their return to Europe they were given false passports and provided with a cover story as journalists. Armed with their new identities they turned up at Massoud's camp in late August 2001. Massoud kept the fake journalists waiting for days and the timing was touch and go but the men hung around until they were eventually granted an audience on September 9.[92] They then detonated a bomb hidden in their camera. Massoud and one of his assistants were killed. One of the bombers died in the attack. The other was captured and shot by Massoud's men.[93]

The assassination was directly linked to the 9/11 attacks and intended to be a game changer for Bin Laden. He had formally notified Al Qaeda's shura council in late August 2001 that the attack against the United States would occur within the next few weeks. As the word spread, high-ranking Al Qaeda men started to send their families' home. The day after the assassination of Massoud, the Taliban launched a long-planned military offensive against the Northern Alliance with the aim of taking undivided control in Afghanistan.[94] Two days later, on the 11th, Bin Laden attacked the United States.

Bin Laden had his own reasons to want Massoud dead. The United States had commissioned Massoud and the Northern Alliance to capture and kill him.[95] But Massoud was also a thorn in the side of Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban. The Taliban pronounced the creation of its Islamic Emirate in 1996 when its fighters took control of Kabul, the capital city. However, the Northern Alliance and other smaller groups continued to control parts of the country. Killing Massoud helped the Taliban gain full control.

Bin Laden's focus on attacking the United States was controversial among the jihadists because of the risk his activities presented to the only living example of the new religious state, the Taliban's Emirate. It is speculated that Bin Laden intended to placate his host, who opposed the "planes project."[96]

Mustafa Hamid (aka Abu Hafs al-Masri, aka Abu Walid al-Masri), an Egyptian fellow traveler who worked as a journalist attached to Al Qaeda, describes in a book written with Leah Farrell a conversation between

Mullah Omar and Bin Laden that allegedly took place after the 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in East Africa. According to this source, Mullah Omar told Bin Laden: "Please don't spoil our work in Afghanistan; we are not ready for this kind of battle against America."[97] It is unclear if Hamid attended the meeting between the two men or paraphrased a conversation he heard about second-hand, but there is enough evidence of the tension between the strategic visions of the two principals to make the account plausible.

Bin Laden also had to deal with objections from Al Qaeda members who worried about Mullah Omar's reaction to the 9/11 attack plot. He responded that Mullah Omar did not have the authority to prevent Al Qaeda from conducting *jihad* outside Afghanistan. After his capture, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad provided evidence that suggested that Bin Laden was mulling over a breach with Mullah Omar.[98]

The Taliban did eventually gain full control of Afghanistan, but their triumph proved short-lived. On October 7, 2001, the United States started aerial bombings of targets in Afghanistan in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks. By November 21, 2001, the Taliban had lost control of Kabul, and by December 9 they had been completely routed by U.S. forces and their allies, one of which was the Northern Alliance.

The Massoud assassination was a complex operation. A network that stretched from Afghanistan to Tunisia, and from Afghanistan to Brussels and London provided logistical support. The cameraman, Rachid Bouraoui el-Ouaer, was a thirty-one-year old migrant textile worker from Sousse in Tunisia, who had to leave his country because of his extremist views. He moved to Germany in 1998 and then to Italy before he landed in Belgium, where he settled illegally. Before coming to Europe, he fought with the jihadists in Chechnya.[99] The man posing as the interviewer was Abdessattar Dahmane (sometimes referred to as Dahmane Abd El-Sattar), a thirty-nine-year old former graduate student at a Catholic university in Belgium. The two men had met at a mosque in Brussels. Dahmane came from a wealthy upper-class family and moved to Belgium in 1986 or 1987 to study for a doctoral degree in journalism. He obtained Belgian citizenship in 1991 through marriage, but quickly divorced his wife. He had left-wing sympathies, drank, and listened to reggae music. At some time between 1997 and 1999, he became involved with the extremist Salafist milieu in Brussels and married a woman who would later become a famous jihadist, Malika El Aroud. The mosque where they met was the *Centre Islamique Belge* (CIB),

a well-known extremist center in the Molenbeek neighborhood of Brussels. A radical preacher, Bassam Ayachi, who officiated the marriage between Dahmane and El Aroud, ran the mosque.

The European managers of the Massoud assassination belonged to the Tunisian Combat Group (TCG). The operation took them months to plan. Their camera had been stolen from a French camera operator in Grenoble on Christmas Eve in 2000.[100] Their false passports, allegedly supplied by the Courtailler brothers, were part of a cache of 19,000 blank passports stolen in Belgium between 1990 and 2000.

The letter of recommendation introducing the fake journalists was written by Yasser al-Sirri, an Egyptian militant living in London.[101] In it, al-Sirri described the assassins as TV journalists working for *Arab News International*, a subsidiary of the Islamic Observation Centre (IOC). In reality, the IOC was operated out of al-Sirri's apartment in London and linked to a bookstore that al-Sirri ran in Paddington, where he sold books and distributed videos proselytizing for *jihad*. One of the Centre's most notorious publications was a statement by Rifa'i Ahmad Taha, who became the leader of *al-Gama'a* after Abdel-Rahman's incarceration in a high security prison in the United States. This authorized the killing of non-Muslim tourists in Egypt. Taha's faction is held responsible for the massacre of tourists and guides at the ancient city Luxor in 1997. He himself was one of the signatories to Bin Laden's 1998 declaration of a united Islamic Front. Allegedly, he later withdrew his signature but whatever his problem was with the declaration, he stayed in the *jihad* business. He was killed in Syria by a U.S. drone strike in April 2016.[102]

Many but not all who were involved in the networks in the 1990s went back into action in 2011, when the Arab Spring made it possible for them to return home. Ben Hassine's successor as leader of the TCG in London, Kamel ben Moussa, took over in 2000, after Ben Hassine moved to Afghanistan. In and out of prison in the United Kingdom without ever standing trial for his role in the assassination of Ahmad Shah Massoud, Kamel ben Moussa was subjected to years of house arrest. He now lives a quiet life in London.

The assassination of Massoud in Afghanistan spurred multiple arrests in London and in Brussels. Al-Sirri was arrested in October 2001 on charges related to the assassination and on other charges linked to money transfers and support of terrorism. A charge of stirring up racial hatred was added to the list. Receipts for large money transfers to accounts in Egypt and Dubai,

Textbox 5.1. The redemption of Kamel ben Moussa

Ben Moussa came to the United Kingdom in 1994 and immediately applied for asylum. His claim was rejected seven years later but he was nevertheless granted leave to remain until 2005. It was a remarkably tolerant decision on the part of the British authorities, because he had been arrested in May 1998—before he was given leave to stay—on a French request in relation to a plot to attack the 1998 world soccer championship: the so-called *Coupe du Monde* plot. He was released three days later and given 18,000 pounds and an official police apology for wrongful arrest. The arrest may have been wrongful but the British authorities continued to regard Ben Moussa with suspicion. He was on the list of people to whom Abu Qatada was banned from speaking under the terms of his control order.[103]

Ben Moussa was arrested again on December 18, 2001 in response to information from the Belgian authorities about his involvement in the assassination of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the Northern Alliance. Tarek Maaroufi, in Brussels, had told his interrogators that Ben Moussa had been in charge of providing false visas and passports to TCG operatives responsible for Massoud's assassination. Moreover, one of the men, Abdesattar Dahmane, had stayed with Ben Moussa in London. Ben Moussa may have sourced the false passports from the Courtailler brothers in the Netherlands,

Ben Moussa was sent to Belmarsh prison, one of Britain's largest prisons, often used for terrorism offenders. He was held there without trial for four years and eventually released, in 2005, by court order. He was then immediately placed under house arrest. This order was squashed in 2007 by the High Court on the grounds that his freedom had been unreasonably restricted. By that time, in 2005, Moussa had been sentenced in absentia to fifty-six years in prison in Tunisia for belonging to a terrorist organization. His conviction in Tunisia actually strengthened Moussa's claim to be allowed to stay in the United Kingdom. on the grounds that he would not be humanely treated should he be returned to Tunisia.

In 2015, *The Sunday Times* (London) alleged that when he arrived in the United Kingdom in 1994 Moussa had admitted to belonging to extremist Islamist groups and confessed that he was traveling on false papers. The newspaper also reported that he had never held a job while in the United Kingdom, and lived on benefits and in public housing. With five children under the age of sixteen, he was entitled to substantial support.[104] Ben Moussa stayed in London through the turbulent years of the Arab Spring. He was the only member of the original TCG leadership quartet not to return to Tunisia to fight, once again, for a jihadist emirate.

in one case over 5,000 British pounds, were found in his house when he was arrested. Al-Sirri and his family were living on government welfare and it was clear that this money did not come out of his personal savings. He was put on trial but was acquitted.

The defense argued that "Mr. al-Sirri" was the victim of a "sophisticated forgery" in which the assassins had used his letterhead to create a series of false documents by which they gained access to Massoud. The judge held with the defense lawyers and argued that had "Mr. al-Sirri" really been involved, he "could have covered his tracks. Instead, he stayed at his home in Maida Vale, in northwest London, and did not destroy any of his documents." The judge described al-Sirri as the "fall guy," an innocent man who "was ignorant of the purpose" of the men for whom he provided the references and had "been used." He then dismissed the charges as "wholly circumstantial."[105]

Al-Sirri was a lucky man. He was wanted for trial in Egypt and in the United States but was allowed to stay in the United Kingdom and continue his life in London. In 2012, the U.K. Supreme Court ruled that al-Sirri could not be deported to Egypt because of the risk that he would be executed. An extradition request from the United States was held by the court to be moot and rejected.[106] Al-Sirri still lives in London and he continues to grant interviews. In 2014, at the time of the split between Al Qaeda and ISIS, he sided with Al Qaeda and railed against the barbarism of the Islamic State.[107]

Postscript

It was startling to see the veterans from Al Qaeda's halcyon days in Europe in the 1990s reemerge as leaders of a jihadist revival in North Africa in 2011 and 2012 after the Arab Spring. The first generation had either left Europe or was in prison after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. By the time the Arab Spring rolled around in 2011 and the old regimes in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt fell, they were once again available. Some had been released and sent on to prisons in their home countries. Others were in hiding. And so it was that Sami Essid and the men from the Tunisian Combat Group and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group had a second life in the tumultuous battle for control in Tunisia and Libya that followed the Arab Spring.[108]

Seifallah ben Hassine, who founded the Tunisian Combat Group in Afghanistan together with Tarek Maaroufi (and Bin Laden) was arrested in Turkey in 2003 and extradited to Tunisia. Here, he was incarcerated until the Arab Spring led to the fall of the regime. Released in 2011, he became one of the founders of a new Al Qaeda affiliate, *Ansar al-Sharia*.[109] In 2013, he moved the group across the border to Libya from where he ran the emerging jihadist network. Ben Hassine was killed in a in a raid by the French army in Mali in 2015 but his death was not announced by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) until 2020.

Maaroufi also had a hand in the formation of the new *Ansar al-Sharia* network. He had been stripped of his Belgian citizenship in 2009 and was let out of prison in Belgium in March 2012. By that time, Tunisia had passed an amnesty law allowing Islamist extremists to return home. Ecstatic supporters greeted him on his return to Tunisia. His listing on the United Nations Security Council's Sanction List (QDi.074) is still active.[110]

Italy deported Sami Essid ben Khemais to Tunisia after he completed two consecutive sentences on charges related to different bomb plots. His lawyers lodged a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which he won, but by the time of the verdict he had already been deported. The court could criticize but not halt the hastily arranged deportation.[111] Ironically, the Human Rights court is located only a short walk away from the Strasbourg Cathedral that Sami Essid planned to bomb in December 2000. What happened after the Italians sent Sami Essid back to Tunisia is uncertain. It is assumed that he was incarcerated upon arrival in Tunisia, and let out after the amnesty law opened the prison doors.

On September 11, 2012, members of ben Hassine's group, *Ansar al-Sharia*, then still a local Al Qaeda affiliate, attacked the American consulate in Benghazi, Libya. The U.S. ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens, and three other State Department employees were killed in the attack. Four days after the attack on the American consulate in Benghazi, *Ansar al-Sharia* attacked the U.S. embassy in Tunis and raised the black standard of *jihad*.[112] The attack was ostensibly in protest against the release of an amateurish YouTube production released under the title of "Innocence of Muslims" in 2012 funded by a so-called American "Islam critic." (It was intended as a provocation and not a serious movie, even by YouTube standards.) The release of the video by the producers in the United States, was followed by protests in Egypt after a Salafist TV station in Cairo showed

brief redacted clips. The subsequent protests orchestrated by Salafist groups followed a pre-planned and orchestrated escalation of violence modeled on the protracted controversy in 2005–06 sparked by the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper.[113]

Ansar al-Shariah marketed the attack on the embassy as retribution against "insults" against the prophet, another surreal chapter in the seemingly never-ending saga of violent reprisals for cartoons representing the Muslim Prophet.

After the September 2012 embassy attack, *Ansar al-Sharia* was banned in Tunisia, and ben Hassine moved the group to Libya in 2013. Here, the group set up a training camp there for Tunisians who wanted to go to fight for the Islamic State.

Meanwhile, the jihadists used their newly granted freedoms to mobilize in Tunisia. In 2013, Ben Khemais was located by an AFP reporter at a demonstration, exalting about the good fortune of the extremists in Tunisia. "On Sunday, we will God willing hold our congress and there will be more than 40,000 of us in Kairouan," Sami Essid told AFP. The journalist had located an official who was not so sure the extremists had permission to have a convention. "But Essid, who is close to the hardline group's fugitive leader Abu Iyadh, insisted they did not need permission to hold their meeting."[114] The mysterious Abu Iyadh, it turned out, was no other than ben Hassine.

Initially, the *Ansar al-Sharia* network was in the Al Qaeda camp and it looked as if they were going to boost Bin Laden's influence in North Africa, but then they rebranded themselves as the Islamic State. Tunisians provided one of the main sources of manpower for the Islamic State in Syria after 2014.[115]

The network was responsible for several high-profile attacks in Tunisia. In February 2015, the rebranded jihadist affiliate made its new philosophy known by executing a group of twenty-one Egyptian Christians clad in orange jumpsuits, invoking the uniforms of Guantanamo Bay detainees, on a beach north of Tripoli, Libya.[116] A few months later, the group was responsible for attacks on a museum and beach hotels that killed fifty-nine people, many of them European tourists. The gunmen had been trained at *Ansar al-Sharia*'s camps in Libya, and several were returnees from the Islamic State's stronghold in Syria.[117] The attacks on tourists replayed the Egyptian Islamic Jihad's tactics from the 1990s with the aim of harming the economy by closing down the tourism industry.

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6

9/11: The Day Everything Changed

When the first plane hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan at 8:46 a.m., it was assumed to be an accident. Immediately all national TV stations were broadcasting live from Manhattan. New Yorkers were well aware that planes could crash into buildings. In fact, two small planes had collided in midair over New Jersey just a month earlier, crashing into a house.[1] But less than twenty minutes later, at 9:03 am, the second plane flew into the South Tower. As the camera caught the second plane hitting the tower, a reporter at the scene put into words what viewers instantaneously realized. "This seems to be on purpose…Now it is obvious I think. We have had a terrorist act of proportions that we cannot begin to imagine at this point."[2] The United States' government and military command learned what was happening at the same time as the entire nation, from an eyewitness on TV. At 9:37 a.m. a third plane crashed into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington D.C.

The country was blindsided by the strikes. Commentators immediately made comparisons to the attack on Pearl Harbor. In December 1941, the imperial Japanese navy and fighter planes struck against the American Pacific fleet stationed in Honolulu, Hawaii, and 2,400 Americans were killed. Nearly 600 more people were killed in the 9/11 attacks. The comparison is in some regards appropriate and in other respects misleading. In 1941 as in 2001, the United States was taken by surprise. Both attacks drew the country into war abroad and cemented the doctrine the United States fights abroad so as not to have to fight the enemy at home. The Pearl Harbor attack ended opposition to direct American participation in World War II, and set the stage for a new role for the country in global affairs. The 9/11 attacks embroiled the United States and its allies in a global morass of

irregular and asymmetric warfare. But as the 9/11 Commission observed, what happened in September 2001 was in some regards more devastating than Pearl Harbor.[3] This time, the country's populous East Coast cities were attacked.

Eventually, it emerged that four planes had been hijacked: American Airlines flight 11 departing from Logan airport in Boston, which crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade center; United Airlines flight 175 also departing from Logan airport which crashed into the South Tower; American Airlines flight 77 departing from Washington Dulles airport which the hijackers flew into the Pentagon building, the striking-looking building housing the U.S. Department of Defense across the Potomac River from Washington D.C.; and United Airlines flight 93, which flew out of Newark airport and crashed in Pennsylvania after the passengers rebelled and tried to break into the cockpit and wrest control from the hijackers.

The hijackings

The first flight took off from Boston at 7:59 a.m. Sixteen minutes later the second flight took off, also from Boston. At 8:19 a.m., a flight attendant on the first flight out of Boston called from a phone in the galley to notify the airline's ground staff that the plane had been hijacked. The third flight, about to be hijacked, took off from Washington Dulles International airport located 26 miles west of Washington D.C., at 8:20 a.m. At 8:25 the civilian air traffic controllers in Boston became aware of the hijacking of the first plane that took off from Boston. The fourth plane to be hijacked was delayed and left Newark Airport outside New York City at 8:42 a.m. The first plane from Boston crashed into the World Trade Center a few minutes later. President George W. Bush, who was on a trip to Florida to promote an educational policy initiative, was alerted about the crash, which was still assumed to be a tragic accident.

The civilian controllers in Boston called what turned out to be a defunct number for the U.S. Air Force in Atlantic City. They also called the local air force base on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Eight minutes later, the first fighter jets were in the air looking for the missing plane. The pilots did not know where the hijacked plane might be headed. It was in any case already too late to intercept the two planes from Boston that the hijackers crashed into the World Trade Center.

By 9:08 a.m. the military air defense controllers at the Northeast Air Defense Sector (NEADS) knew that several planes were missing, but not exactly how many. Chaos ruled.[4] The hijackers had turned off the transponders, thereby disabling the regular flight trackers that are used to locate civilian aircraft while they are in the air, and so the civilian Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) did not know the location of the hijacked planes. The military was similarly stymied.

The NEADS headquarter was then in Rome in upstate New York. (The agency was renamed Eastern Air Defense Sector (EADS) in 2009.) The air force controllers in Rome learned from a technician outside the control room, who had the TV on, that the planes they were looking for had crashed into the World Trade Center. Col. Robert Marr, who was in charge of NEADS floor operations, recalled: "We decided very quickly we needed to get a TV into the control room to help us with our decision-making process because those were the guys with the eyes on the scene telling us what was going on."[5] The NEADS controllers had nine minutes advance notice before the first plane crashed into the World Trade Center, but they too did not know where to find the plane.

Air traffic controllers and the airlines initially assumed that the hijackers were planning to take the planes and the passengers on board hostage, and would want to exchange them against some still unknown demand. Protocols were in place for dealing with hijackers who wanted to negotiate.[6] This was what hijackers usually did. Cubans wishing to go to the United States hijacked planes throughout the 1990s, negotiating for asylum. In 1993, an Ethiopian man hijacked a Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to Cairo and ordered the pilot to fly to JFK airport in New York, where he gave himself up. In 1994, a disgruntled FedEx employee hijacked a FedEx cargo plane and attempted to kill the crew. The crew restrained him, and the plane landed safely. Hijackings with more tragic outcomes had occurred in other countries but not in the United States.[7]

When the first plane crashed into the North Tower, it became clear that the hijackers had not planned on any negotiations. The urgent priority was at that point to locate and intercept the other planes. But a reconstructed timeline showed that there had been no time for a military response. First in the air were the two F-15 fighter jets that took off from the base on Cape Cod. They were airborne by 08:53 a.m., six minutes after Mohammed Atta, the hijacker-pilot crashed American Airlines 11 into the World Trade Center's North Tower.

The FAA's center in Washington D.C. was alerted that one of the missing planes had been spotted approaching Washington D.C. The military Air Force controllers immediately ordered fighter jets from Langley Air Force Base in Northern Virginia near Washington D.C. in the air but the pilots followed standing orders and flew east, out over the Attlantic Ocean. The third hijacked flight, American Airlines Flight 77, was by then less than seven minutes away from its target. At 9:37 a.m., it crashed into the Pentagon.

It was still not known how many flights had been hijacked, or where the other planes might be. The White House and Congress were evacuated.

The search pilots did not know where to look for the hijacked planes or how to distinguish a hijacked plane from any other commercial aircraft.[8] Following the established contingency plans, the pilots who took off from Langley had flown east over the Atlantic Ocean, as if to counter incoming missiles from the Soviet Union.[9] The Soviet Union had disintegrated in 1991 but no new plans had been drawn up. "NORAD (a joint U.S. and Canadian aerospace command) perceived the dominant threat to be from cruise missiles," according to the assessment of the 9/11 Commission Report.[10] The lead pilot told the 9/11 Commission committee: "I reverted to the Russian threat [...] I am thinking cruise missile threat from the sea. You know, you look down and see the Pentagon burning and I thought the bastards snuck by us [...] You couldn't see any airplanes, and no one told us anything."[11]

At 10:03, the fourth plane, United Flight 93, heading towards Washington D.C., crashed in Western Pennsylvania when the passengers stormed the cockpit. Newark airport suffers from chronic delays and the flight took off late. Because of the delay, the passengers had learned the fate of the other planes from cell phones, and heroically took matters into their own hands. All on board died. United Airlines itself discovered that the flight had been hijacked less than thirty minutes before the crash. The air force learned about the plane on its way to Washington D.C. four minutes after it had crashed.

On the ground

A reconstructed timeline showed that shortly after 10:10 a.m., the Vice-President, Dick Cheney, issued an order to shoot down any identified hijacked civilian airliner.[12] One of the questions that haunted the 9/11

Commission investigation was whether the order to shoot down the hijacked civilian aircraft was issued in accordance with the Constitution but George W. Bush took the issue off the table by confirming that he had discussed the order with Cheney and given the authorization. "We had a little discussion, but not much," Bush later said about the shoot-down order.[13] The Vice President, and apparently also the President, believed that the fighter pilots had been ordered to shoot down hijacked aircraft but the pilots had only been instructed to identify and "tail" suspect aircraft.[14] In any case, the first F-16 fighter jets that were sent up to track the missing planes were not carrying missiles. Pilots scanned the sky with their naked eyes looking for hijacked planes. Some later said that they had planned to ram their jets into any hijacked aircraft they encountered.[15]

The Federal Aviation Agency acted quickly to empty the U.S. air space. At 9:25 a.m., the more than 4,000 planes in the air over the U.S. that morning were grounded. All incoming international flights were diverted to Canada. The grounding of civilian flights was not complete until 12:16 p.m., which meant that the possibility a civilian aircraft could have been shot down by mistake in the chaos was painfully real[16] As it turned out, all the hijacked flights had crashed by the time the shoot-down order was communicated. Had any of the fighter pilots in the air acted on an order to shoot down suspect aircraft, they might have brought down a stray civilian aircraft. At one point, a Delta flight was thought to have been hijacked. It wasn't.

Meanwhile, what the early nineteenth-century Prussian general, Carl von Clausewitz called the Fog of War set in.[17] The concept refers to the uncertainty created by a breakdown of situational awareness caused by communications failures in battle. (Von Clausewitz, who is taught to every student taking an international relations class in an American college, and certainly at the military academies, was referring to the fog caused by cannon fire.) That day, the U.S. government, the central command, the military fighter pilots, and the civilian air traffic controllers found themselves in battle with no coordinates for the enemy. What had happened was unimaginable. It therefore seemed probable that even more unimaginable things could happen. Rumors of explosions at the Capitol and on the Mall, and of planes approaching the White House caused panic in Washington D.C. There were also reports that Camp David had been hit and Bush's Texas ranch targeted. At one point a car bomb was reported to have gone off outside the State Department. Richard Clarke, the national security advisor in the White House, would later describe how he called Richard Armitage, a deputy

secretary of state, in the State Department, asking for a report. Armitage walked outside to take a look and reported back that there was no bomb.[18] A helicopter flying towards the burning Pentagon to ferry out the wounded was mistaken for a hostile plane. Taking refuge in the White House bunker, the Vice President was told that one or more planes were heading towards Washington D.C., presumably targeting the White House or Congress. The Secret Service made a mistake because they were looking at flight tracker—a publicly available program online—rather than radar. Flight tracker does not update in real time, and therefore did not show that the aircraft were no longer in the air.[19]

Politico published on the five-year anniversary, in 2016, an oral history based on interviews with the president's entourage who were flying on Air Force One that fateful day in 2001.[20] President Bush was at an elementary school in Sarasota, Florida. On board were sixty-five passengers who were staffers and members of the press corps following President Bush on the trip to Florida, the crew, and the President himself. The account makes for extraordinary reading, and brings out the bewilderment they felt. Communications gear failed. The President and those with him knew very little about what had happened, and had no clue what might happen next. Intelligence had failed in a catastrophic way. Paranoia took hold. One staffer admitted to fearing car bombs as the President's motorcade rushed from the elementary school in Sarasota, where the president had been reading to the children. Territory that was previously thought to be safe could no longer be taken for granted. Journalists and passengers were ordered to remove the batteries from their phones so they could not be used to track the plane.

When Air Force One carrying the President took off from the local airport it was with no known destination. The initial plan was to go to an air force base in Louisiana, and then on to a base in Nebraska. Vice President Cheney told President Bush that Air Force One was a target. Air traffic controllers warned the pilot of the President's plane that a "suspect airliner" was "dead ahead."[21] The idea that a hijacked civilian aircraft could strike Air Force One in midair is so fantastic that it invites scrutiny. Only paranoia could make the notion that the hijackers would be able to locate and target the President's plane over the vast American continent seem reasonable. In fact, the hijackers used ordinary road maps and visual recognition along the Hudson valley to locate their targets in Lower Manhattan. KSM later told his GTMO interrogators that the

fourth plane was heading for the Capitol building. The White House was, allegedly, too difficult to strike using only visual recognition, which was what the hijackers had available. President Bush landed safely in Washington D.C. late in the day on September 11.

Within an hour of the first plane hitting the World Trade Center, it was recognized that the attacks had been masterminded by Osama Bin Laden.[22] Members of Congress and the White House staff knew that they had been directly targeted by Al Qaeda. This was personal, very personal. The realization deeply affected the political psychology of the political elite in Washington D.C.

In an interview with *National Geographic* ten years later, President Bush gave a very personal answer when asked to describe his first thoughts that day. "One of my concerns, like the concerns of other husbands and their wives, was my spouse OK. Was Laura OK? My second concern was, were my girls OK? It took a while to find her [Laura]. She was in a secure location. It was awesome to hear her comforting voice. And she had talked to the girls. And they were secure. That was a relief for me."[23]

That the President's first thoughts should have been for the safety of his wife and daughters may be understandable. Bush spoke as a husband and father rather than as President. The answer was nonetheless bewildering. I am unsettled every time I play the video with the interview in class. My students express inarticulate discomfort. When I first started to teach a class on the 9/11 attacks, there were sometimes students in the class who had had family members die that day. They had a right to make it personal. But everyone wanted the President to think about the nation first.

Planning the 9/11 attacks

Al Qaeda's preparations for the 9/11 attacks were elaborate. A great deal is now known about the run-up to the attacks, and the failures of the U.S. policy makers to preempt Bin Laden's strike. *The 9/11 Report* compiled a thorough narrative of the conspiracy. Two superb histories, Steve Coll's *Ghost Wars* (2005) and Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower* (2006) cover the clandestine activities of Bin Laden and his associates, and document the U.S. government's futile efforts to find and eliminate Bin Laden before he made good on his promise to attack the United States.[24]

The focus here is different. The question that drove my research is how this small group of conspirators could pull off what was an extraordinary feat of international planning and organization. The planning began months before the 1998 East Africa embassy bombing and carried on in parallel with preparations for Al Qaeda's other projects, including the ambitious but ultimately failed plans for the Millennium campaign. Final strategic decisions were taken in spring 1999, when Bin Laden gave KSM the go-ahead for "the planes operation." By that time, the men selected for the missions were drawn from the trainees at Al Qaeda's training camp in Afghanistan.

But KSM had been working on the blueprints since 1994. He and his nephew, Ramzi Yousef, started to experiment with planting bombs on planes already in the second half of 1994. On Bin Laden's instructions, and overseen by KSM, Yousef and a collaborator, Abdul Hakim Murad, worked on plans involving the use of liquid bombs on trans-pacific civilian aircraft The plot failed spectacularly when the bomb makers blew up the kitchen in their apartment in Manila while mixing the bombs. Murad admitted after he was arrested in 1996 that he had attended an American flight school as part of a plan that he was going to fly a small plane into the CIA's headquarters outside Washington D.C.[25] In 1997, an Al Qaeda cell in Madrid sent a member to the United States to videotape possible targets, including the World Trade Center.[26] Bin Laden dispatched reconnaissance teams to the United States again in 1998 and 1999 to scout targets.[27] He had also steered volunteers to pilot schools in the United States since the early 1990s. Bin Laden had clearly been mulling doing "something" with civilian aircrafts for years.

The operational organization behind the attacks made use of a transnational organization of remarkable breadth and depth. This was not a hierarchy with a boss who communicated with other bosses, who brought in contractors, and passed orders down in the manner of the 1993 Brooklyn-based group. It was different also from the secretive small Frankfurt cell of experienced operatives who, in the manner of Joseph Conrad's *Secret Agent*, moved in to prepare an attack on the Christmas market in front of the cathedral in Strasbourg.

Why did the 9/11 conspiracy succeed when previous attempts to produce coordinated attacks in multiple locations in Europe and North America had failed in one way or another? The attacks followed on two years of largely failed missions but still grew out of the same networks in

Europe that had provided the manpower that staffed the many unsuccessful conspiracies. There was a similar command structure. Local Al Qaeda agents identified talent. Recruits went to the camps in Afghanistan. Atef and Bin Laden selected the operatives to do the job, and KSM provided the logistical blueprints and arranged for specialized training.

The answer may be simply that this time the terrorists had a more effective command structure. The organization of the 9/11 attacks exemplifies what in Business School language is called a nimble leadership and agile organization. Operational decisions were decentralized. Once they were in the United States, the hijackers took care to split up and move around frequently. If one cell was disabled, the others could have carried on with the project. As the architect, KSM was concerned with the big picture. Mohammed Atta was a detail-oriented manager on the ground.

A picture of the organization behind the hijackers emerges from network graph visualization using data collected by the Western Jihadism Project (see Figure 6.1.). Using information about who met with whom and the communications between the hijackers and their contacts we can diagram the structure of the organization. The diagram shows the four teams of the nineteen hijackers forming a set of cells, each with its own nucleus but connected to each other and embedded within other wider, overlapping networks of moneymen and coordinators. The inner ring of coordinators passed information vertically up to the super bosses—Bin Laden and Mohammed Atef, Al Qaeda's military chief at the time—in Afghanistan and, horizontally, between middle managers. The outer network included support staff based in Europe and in the Middle East, and a cadre of Al Qaeda directors in Europe. These were the same men who had organized the Millennium campaign: Imad Yarkas (alias Abu Dahdah) in Spain, Abu Qatada al-Filistini in London, and Essid Sami ben Khemais in Milan.

The four pilots, all of them Muslim immigrant to Europe, were from Germany. Mohamed Atta, an Egyptian, was the tactical leader of the plot and piloted American Airlines flight 11 from Boston into the North Tower. Marwan al-Shehi, from the United Arab Emirates, took the controls of United Airlines flight 175 from Boston to Los Angeles and flew the plane into the South Tower. Hani Hanjour, from Saudi Arabia, flew American Airlines flight 77, departing from Dulles airport to Los Angeles, into the Pentagon. Ziad Jarrah, from Lebanon, whose flight was delayed out of Newark, was the pilot who crashed his flight in Pennsylvania after the

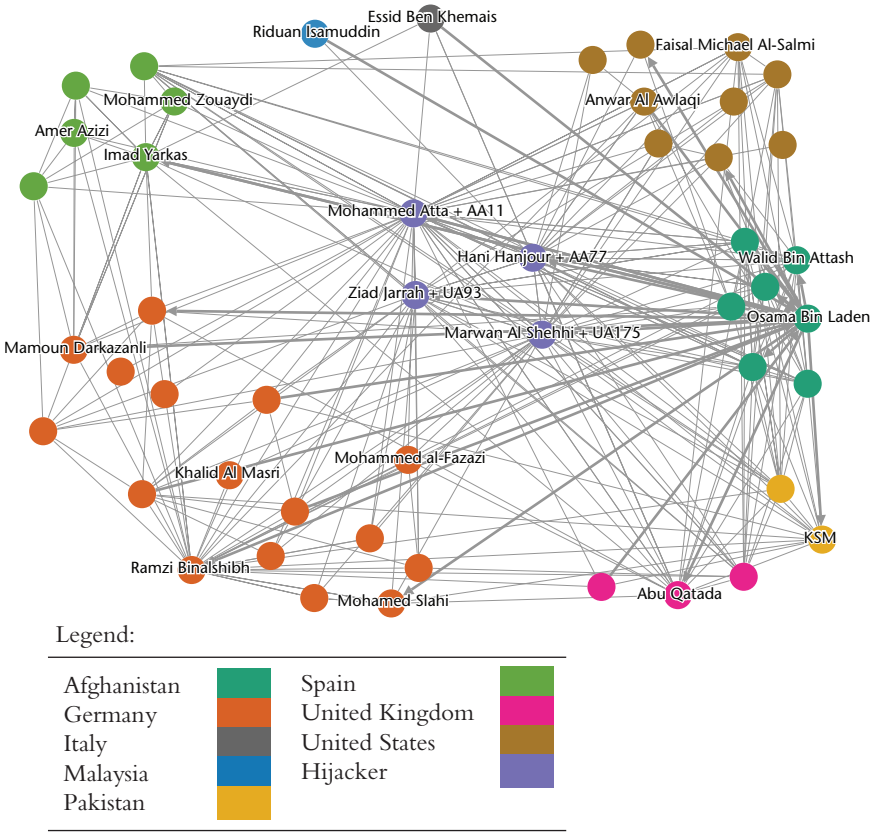

Figure 6.1. Network graph showing the 9/11 hijacker teams and their Al Qaeda recruiters and connected support cells in Europe and the United States.

Node N = 65. Edge N = 593.

Source: The Western Jihadism Project. Created in Gephi by Rosanne Libretti.

passengers rebelled. The flights were all heading to the West Coast. They were selected because they would carry a heavy fuel load.

The men knew each other from Germany and from training camps in Afghanistan. They drew on an extended network of operatives, preachers and recruiters, and sometimes people who just wanted to help but did not know a great conspiracy was in the works. Kinship and friendship ties are important resources, particularly among immigrants who are accustomed to extend kindness and support to those who are in the same boat as they are. The hijackers went beyond exploiting the kindness of others. They counted on the support and discretion of legacy networks in what was a matter of life and death.

The four teams that carried out the hijackings were put together from a network of potential recruits, some of whom never made it to the United States. Once the hijackers arrived in America, they were able to call on people who were already living in the country for assistance. These included sleepers who had been there since the early 1990s, when Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri joined forces. Some of the American helpers and facilitators acted from charity, the way immigrants help new arrivals find their feet. Among the facilitators were also people who may not have known exactly what the hijackers were up to but would surely have suspected that they were up to "something."

Investigations carried out by the 9/11 Commission and the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee revealed that the hijackers gravitated towards cities and locations where Al Qaeda had developed support cells earlier in the 1990s. They went to flight schools where other Al Qaeda operatives had previously received training. Phoenix, Arizona, was one such place. In July 2001, a FBI agent in Phoenix wrote to FBI experts in New York and Washington D.C, seeking guidance on how to deal with a suspiciously large number of young men with apparent extremist views enrolled in flight training or studying aeronautics in the area.[28] The Arizona agent speculated that they were part of an effort to train a cadre of flight professionals for terrorist purposes. One of the men who had attracted attention in Arizona was observed driving a car that belonged to a different man, who had been detained in 1999, together with a third man, trying to enter the cockpit of a plane during a domestic flight. The men claimed that they got lost looking for the bathroom and were never prosecuted. They may have been part of one of Bin Laden and KSM's advance teams, testing and scouting to assist operational planning for a plot to highjack a commercial airliner.

The hijackers went to seven mosques in five states, a disproportionate number of which were also attended by people of interest to U.S. law enforcement because of their presence on the fringes of the 1993 World Trade Center attacks or other incidents in the 1990s. Two of these mosques were home to Anwar al-Awlaki, the U.S.-born Yemini whose preaching inspired a generation of post-9/11 extremists. The first two hijackers to arrive in the United States, Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaz al-Hazmi, went straight to Awlaki in San Diego. He helped them settle in and continued to provide assistance, even paying for airline tickets. A joint Senate and House Intelligence Committee inquiry found that, between them, five of the hijackers (Mohammed Atta, Hani Hanjour, Marwan al-Shehhi, Nawaz al-Hazmi, and Khalid al-Mihdhar) made contact during their stay in the

United States with fourteen people who had been subject to previous counterterrorism investigations. Four were under active investigation at the time they met with the hijackers.[29] Some of the hijackers' associates had also exhibited an extraordinary interest in aeronautics. Their interest in flying combined with lack of interest in a professional use of the skills for which they paid a lot of money was by itself a red flag. Their mobility helped obscure the trail, however. They never stayed long at the same flight school. They were circumspect and when they behaved in ways that today would be seen as alarming, they passed, in those days, for eccentrics or perhaps stereotypical Arabs.

The hijackers arrived in the United States at different times and came in through different airports. Once in the country, they were constantly on the move. The nineteen hijackers used 364 aliases during their stay in the United States. They came and went, traveling in an out of the United States thirty-three times between January 15, 2000, and September 11, 2001.[30]

They lived and traveled together in teams of two or three, creating enough contact within the small cells to exercise social control but not so much that they would attract attention. Six of the nineteen were brothers, who were assigned to work together comprising three sibling teams. This was no coincidence. Family ties reduce risk: an operative is less likely to defect if he leaves behind a fellow soldier, who is also a brother. In fact, the inclusion of siblings and cousins in attack cells is now recognized as a typical pattern. The cells lived independently. If one group was arrested, the others still had a good chance of succeeding. Their hypermobility meant that they moved on before attracting too much suspicion.

There has been much speculation about the number and the composition of the teams. The final count—four teams, four pilots, and nineteen hijackers—was probably an accidental outcome. The pilots were the elite soldiers in the mission, and not everyone selected for pilot status could make it. Fifteen of the hijackers were Saudi citizens. Bin Laden probably liked the idea of sticking it to the Saudi royal family by deploying Saudis to attack the United States, the royal family's greatest ally. Two of the Saudis, Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar, appear to have been Bin Laden's favorites. He personally selected them for the "planes operation." However, both men failed their flight training, probably because of their poor English language skills. Ramzi Binalshibh was from Yemen but was living in Germany using false papers. He too was tapped to become a pilot but was not admitted

to the United States. Four of the designated operatives, Mohammed Atta, Marwan al Shehhi, Ziad Jarrah and Ramzi Binalshibh, at one point in time shared an apartment in a depressed area of Hamburg.

The daily lives of the men in the Hamburg cell is superbly described by Terry McDermott, a journalist for the *Los Angeles Times*, in his book, *Perfect Soldiers.*[31] McDermott based his book on interviews with associates of the hijackers and their families. The men from Hamburg belonged to a roving clique of young men. They attached themselves to veterans whose status came from their experiences as fighters in Afghanistan and Bosnia and their travels to Bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan. The Hamburg group spent their days debating and studying the "correct" interpretation of religious law, and the proper program for making the revolution. They also went about Hamburg proselytizing among other Muslim immigrants, an activity that we now recognize as a characteristic part of the pattern of radicalization. They taught others, as they themselves came to believe in the ideal of glorious martyrdom in the service of the armed *jihad*.

Throughout the 1990s, there were networks like this in cities and towns across Western Europe and North America. The activities of the Hamburg group described by McDermott are now recognized as typical of groups of young men who are being drawn into cultish or extremist communities. Similar tightly knit cult-like groups developed at the same time in other small German cities, and in Birmingham, Brussels, and Milan.

The Hamburg group exhibited all the now familiar signs of radicalization. In a cult-like fashion, members of the clique become increasingly absorbed in the activities associated with the extremist belief system as these are prescribed by the doctrines and preached by local recruiters. They are encouraged to engage in petty criminality and fraud to sustain their activities, and to share the spoils with the group. They withdraw from family and their normal activities, ignore their studies, and take temporary casual jobs that involve no oversight.

One difference to comparable networks elsewhere in Europe at that time was that the Hamburg group was unusually mixed in terms of participants' national origin. Atta was Egyptian. A student of urban planning at a university in Hamburg, he became the designated troop leader, giving instructions to the other hijackers and twice traveling from the United States to meetings in Europe in the summer before the hijackings. Ostensibly, the Hamburg circle participants were students, but only Atta appears to have graduated.

Al-Shehhi was from the United Arab Emirates and came from a middle-class family. He joined the army in the UAE and was on an army scholarship to study in Germany. His scholarship funded some of the Hamburg group's activities. He traveled home to the Emirates to marry a woman chosen by the family. She gave birth shortly before the 9/11 attacks.

Jarrah was Lebanese and had a Turkish-origin girlfriend in Germany. He was studying dentistry in Germany but switched to aircraft engineering in 1997. His family was wealthy and was kind to Jarrah and his girlfriend, providing them with money when they needed it. The girlfriend and her family were unaware of Jarrah's radicalization, although both families noticed that he was becoming increasingly orthodox and sometimes scolded family members for their insufficiently observant ways. The girlfriend traveled to visit Jarrah during his stay in the United States, apparently to the disapproval of the stern Atta, who acted as the moral supervisor for the group. Jarrah also flew back several times to visit his girlfriend in Germany during his flight training in the United States, and they went on vacations together. When the girlfriend became pregnant, she had an abortion and told Jarrah about it. At some point the two married in a religious ceremony that probably was not registered. We now know that religious marriages are frequent among men radicalizing and seen as desirable for the preparation of martyrdom. Neither of the families was told of the marriage.[32]

Binalshibh was from a poor family in Yemen. He came to Germany on an elaborate scam in which he pretended to be Sudanese and to have arrived by sea as a stowaway in a shipping container. He applied for political asylum in Germany using a false name and was rejected. Eventually, he managed an identity switch and got a visa under his real name on the basis of a fraudulent enrollment letter to a local technical school (he did not attend classes) and a letter of support from a local businessman. Calling himself "Omar," he spent his days traveling around Hamburg giving religious instruction. He was the charismatic leader, while Atta was the enforcer of the rules in the group.

Like the others, Binalshibh applied for a visa to go to the United States to attend flight school. He planned to become one of the pilots for the mission, but his visa application was rejected. This was not because of possible security concerns raised by his circle of extremist friends in Hamburg. His problem was that he was from Yemen, which was on a list of countries regarded as so poor that he was considered a high risk for overstaying his visa. Forced to stay behind, he became the European production manager

of the plot. He is today one of forty men associated with Al Qaeda's high command and the 9/11 plot who are still incarcerated in the prison on the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base.

After the 9/11 attacks much effort went into identifying who exactly had recruited the hijackers. The list of suspects is long. Travel to Afghanistan was so common that people often went two or three times, if not more, up until September 2001. The four friends said that they went to Afghanistan to fight in Chechnya, which was the thing to do then. Practically everyone who moved on to carry out an attack in Europe or in North America after having attended a training camp in Afghanistan told friends and family—and investigators—they were heading to Chechnya. It is hard to know if it was a cover story they were told to use, or if it reflected their real intentions. Fighting in Chechnya for a Muslim group was not an illegal act then. McDermott found circumstantial evidence that Atta, Binalshibh and Shehhi were unaccountably absent from Hamburg for several months in early 1998. He speculates that they went to Afghanistan at that time.[33] Perhaps so, but an additional trip makes no difference to our understanding of how they were recruited for the attacks or to the understanding of the timeline for the planning of the attacks.

Back in Afghanistan for a second visit in November 1999, the four volunteers from Hamburg met with KSM and Bin Laden and were prepared for the "planes operation." Their assets were obvious. They were acculturated to Western lifestyles and spoke English to varying degrees. On their return to Hamburg in early 2000 they applied for U.S. visas.

The Europeans

A murky chain of contacts brought the four friends from Hamburg to Afghanistan. It is a rare case of too many leads: any one or all of the local contacts could have facilitated their travel to Afghanistan and brought the men to Bin Laden's attention.

GTMO investigators put weight on what may have been a chance meeting with Mohamedou Ould Slahi, a Mauritanian who had sworn *bayat* (allegiance) to Bin Laden in 1991. However, happenstance now seems an unlikely explanation. Little was left to chance in this network. Slahi came to Germany on a scholarship to study in 1988 and went to Afghanistan after graduating. He moved to Montreal in November 1999, where he lived until

January 2000. While in Montreal, he was involved with Ahmed Ressam. (Ressam was arrested in December 2000 with a bomb in his car on his way to bomb the airport in Los Angeles, see Chapter 5.)[34] Slahi was accused of having recruited the men in Hamburg for the training camps in Afghanistan and having put them in touch with Bin Laden before he moved to Canada. He was arrested in Jordan and detained in GTMO on suspicion that he had help Binalshibh recruit the Hamburg cell. Slahi was classified as a "high-value" detainee and was subject to torture and harsh interrogations. He was released into custody in Mauritania in 2016. He still lives there.

Slahi was a suspect in part because his brother-in-law, Abu Hafs al-Mauritani (alias Mahfouz Ould al-Walid), was a member of Al Qaeda's *sharia* council, the body of religiously learned supervisors who approved Bin Laden's plans. Abu Hafs ended up in Iran in December 2001 after Al Qaeda fled Afghanistan. There, he lived under semi-house arrest for ten years. After his release he gave interviews in which he spoke about his role as a negotiator on behalf of Bin Laden's family members and other Al Qaeda families who also fled to Iran in late 2001.[35] Abu Hafs now says he always disapproved of the 9/11 attacks. He also now lives in Mauritania.

But perhaps the imam was the contact who sent the men to Al Qaeda's training camps? The Hamburg group was attached to the Al-Quds Mosque, which opened in 1993. Turkish associations then ran most mosques in Hamburg, and indeed, in Germany. People attending would mostly speak Turkish and conform to Turkish styles of observance. The al Quds mosque, however, catered to an Arab-speaking population. The imam was a Moroccan firebrand cleric, who preached Salafi-jihadist tropes about the religious duty to kill Jews and "crusaders."[36] He had contacts with Moroccan-Algerian terrorist networks in Europe. The imam, Mohammed al-Fazazi, left Hamburg before the 9/11 attacks.

Al-Fazazi was convicted and sentenced in 2003 by a Moroccan court, sentenced to 30 years in prison on charges of instigating coordinated suicide bombings targeting Jewish sites in Casablanca. Thirty-three victims and twelve bombers died in the attacks. He, too, is now rehabilitated. He renounced extremism in 2009 and received a royal pardon in 2011. In 2014, al-Fazazi led prayer in Tangiers with King Mohammed VI in attendance. It is a remarkable comeback that appears to be sincere.[37]

The imam's son-in-law may also have been an intermediary. Al-Fazazi's daughter was married to Naamen Meziche, a French-Algerian Al Qaeda

operative. He and Binalshibh were allegedly in phone contact a week before the 9/11 attacks. Meziche lived for some time in Germany and was under investigation for his ties to the 9/11 cell. He was eventually arrested in Pakistan in 2012 and send on to France to stand trial on charges related to a different conspiracy.

In addition, there is a Kurdish-born recruiter in Hamburg, Mohammed Haydar Zammar, who is also suspected of sending the men from Hamburg to the training camps in Afghanistan.[38] Zammar, a Syrian, had regular contacts with other well-known extremist Syrians in Europe, including Imad Yarkas in Spain and Mamoun Darkazanli in Germany. After the 9/11 attacks, Zammar went traveling and ended up getting arrested in Morocco and then deported to Syria, where he was incarcerated for twelve years on a conviction dating back to the 1980s from his days as a member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. In 2018, a journalist from *The Washington Post* found Zammar in a Kurdish detention camp and interviewed him. Zammar talked, even bragged, about his connections to the hijackers from Hamburg and how he had once met Bin Laden himself.[39] A Bosnia veteran, Zammar spent time in one of Bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan in late 1999. There, he met the men from Hamburg. But Zammar says he had no advance knowledge of the 9/11 plot. It is plausible. So many people went to the camps that they were routinely running into each other. German and American investigators eventually concluded that Zammar was not in the loop.[40]

Social networks integrate the past, the present, and the future. Zammar was a small player in the 9/11 network but he was better connected than has perhaps been generally assumed. The Syrians freed him in 2013 in a prisoner swap for Syrian diplomats that had been captured by Al Qaeda. The exchange was organized by another central 9/11 attack figure, Mohammed al-Bahaiya, who is better known as Abu Khaled al-Suri ("the Syrian"). Abu Khaled was a veteran from the days of Abdullah Azzam and a personal friend of Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri. He moved to eastern Syria in late 2011 to represent Al Qaeda's interests in the escalating insurgency. (Abu Khaled was a co-founder of Ahrar al-Sham, a forerunner to the al-Nusra Front which was Al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria. He was killed by an ISIS suicide squad in his headquarters in Aleppo, in eastern Syria, on February 21, 2014 together with six of his men. The assassination took place three weeks after al-Zawahiri disowned ISIS).

The surprise in Zammar's story is that after being an Al Qaeda man for decades, he joined ISIS. In *The Washington Post* interview, he explained that

he knew several ISIS leaders from his days in prison and decided to throw his lot in with them. But he also liked that ISIS was giving out wives. The "caliphate" gave him two, one of whom was pregnant when he surrendered to the Kurdish militia in the Syrian Democratic Forces, looking for medical help. In the interview, Zammar pressed his claim to return to Germany to be reunited with his first wife. His claim is unlikely to be successful. Germany does not allow polygamy.

But it is Mamoun Darkazanli, another Syrian, who is most frequently mentioned as the man who connected the Hamburg militants to Al Qaeda. He was once photographed attending a wedding with two of the hijackers. (Zammar and Darkazanli went to high school together in Syria.) Darkazanli's import-export business in Hamburg is considered to have been an Al Qaeda front. He is accused of having opened bank accounts for the hijackers. He has also been accused of funding Wadih el-Hage, Bin Laden's advance man in both the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 1998 embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya. Allegedly, Darkazanli helped buy a ship for Bin Laden and also opened bank accounts for Mamdouh Mahmud Salim. Salim visited Hamburg several times. He was convicted in the 1998 embassy bombings and is known also to have tried to obtain nuclear material from the Iranians on Bin Laden's behalf. Darkazanli may also have conspired with an Al Qaeda fundraiser in the Madrid cell that provided logistical support for the 9/11 hijackers.

Darkazanli is a Specially Designated Global Terrorist listed by Interpol, placed on the sanctions lists of the United Nations Security Council, the European Union, and designated a financier of terrorism by the U.S. and U.K. Treasury departments. (The U.N. Security Council's Al-Qaida and Taliban Sanctions Committee approved deleting Darkazanli's import-export company from its sanctions list on July 15, 2010.) He has never been convicted of a terrorism offense. He was arrested in 2004 in Germany but his release was ordered by the German Federal court on the grounds that the government had failed to prosecute him in a timely manner. He is assumed to still be living in Hamburg.

Other members of the network in Hamburg played support roles or acted as backups. The plan may have been to maintain reserves who could be called up in case one of the pilots dropped out or was arrested. Said Bahaji and Zakariya Essabar both intended to get pilot training. Essabar tried twice, in December 2000 and in January 2001, to come to the United States to attend pilot school after Binalshibh failed to get a visa. He was

refused entry both times. Binalshibh, Essabar and Bahaji left Germany in September 2001 for Afghanistan shortly before the attacks. Munir Mottasadeq lived with Atta in the apartment in Hamburg. He too went to the camps in Afghanistan in 2000. After lengthy court proceedings in Germany, he was eventually convicted of participating in a terrorist conspiracy and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. In 2018, he was released from prison and expelled to Morocco, his country of origin.

Hani Hanjour, a Saudi, was not part of the Hamburg set. He first traveled to Afghanistan for six weeks in 1989 when he was seventeen to participate in the armed struggle. In October 1991, he visited the United States for the first time to attend an English language program at the University of Arizona in Tucson. When he left the United States in early 1992, to go back home to Saudi Arabia, he was a "different person" a brother told the media. The Director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet, told the joint Senate and House Intelligence Committee inquiry that Hanjour "wore a full beard, cut his past social ties, and spent most of his time reading books on religion and airplanes."[41]

Hanjour returned to the United States in 1996 to visit families he had gotten to know during his student days in Arizona. Or maybe it was not the host families he wanted to visit. Allegedly, by then he "associated himself" with extremist circles in Tucson and Phoenix.[42] Both cities were centers of extremist activity in the early 1990s, and home to one of the support hubs for the extremists in Brooklyn. If accurate, this suggests that the young Saudi was radicalized in the United States and not in Saudi Arabia, as has been assumed. He could, of course have been exposed to influential voices in both places.

Hanjour spent tens of thousands of dollars on flight training in the United States. The sequence of his travels is unclear, but he was back again in the United States for flight training and got a FAA commercial flight certificate before leaving in April 1999. He then went to Afghanistan again and was picked for the "planes operation." In September 2000, he came to the United States once more on a student visa, staying first in Florida and then traveling to California to meet up with Hazmi and Mihdhar. Together, they then moved to Arizona, Hanjour's old stomping grounds.

Hanjour may have become a substitute for Binalshibh when the latter could not get a visa. But it is also possible that Hanjour was intended to be the pilot for another cell that for lack of manpower never materialized. KSM has claimed that he intended to have as many as ten flights hijacked.

There may also have been another plot to hijack flights out of London a few days after the 9/11 attacks. The plan was foiled by the global shutdown of air traffic imposed after attacks on New York and Washington D.C.

Sixteen of the hijackers never lived in Europe. Fifteen were Saudis. Eight of them were brothers, two sets of three brothers and one set of two brothers. Several of them were friends who had known each other for years. Nawaf al-Hazmi applied for a U.S. visa in April 1999.[43] He used a newly issued passport to erase stamps showing his travel to Afghanistan and other hot zones for *jihad*. Hazmi and his friend, Khalid al-Mihdhar, had gone to fight in Bosnia in 1995 and traveled on from there to one of Bin Laden's training camps in Afghanistan. Hazmi, another precocious teenage jihadi, first visited Afghanistan in 1993. George Tenet described him and his friend, al-Mihdhar, as Al Qaeda veterans with six years or more of association with Bin Laden's recruiters and repeated camp visits behind them when they were selected for the mission that became the 9/11 attacks.[44] Hazmi is also suspected of having been in contact with Abu Zubaydah, an Al Qaeda recruiter and guesthouse manager, who came to Saudi Arabia in 1996 to recruit young Saudis for Bin Laden's camps in Afghanistan.

Al Qaeda had plenty of manpower for the mission. Nine or ten more people were recruited who did not end up being part of the operation on September 11. The exact number of wannabe hijackers is not known. They did not make it on board one of the hijacker planes for various reasons. Two Yemini men were picked for the mission, but were reassigned to a different plot when it became clear that they would not be able to get visas to the United States.[45] Bin Laden and KSM may have envisioned more hijacked planes. They may also have been trying to stack the bench to be sure to have backups should the dream team suffer losses.

Some of the men were already known to U.S. intelligence. Hazmi's friend, Mihdhar, and two other hijackers attended a planning meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in early January 2000. Ramzi Binalshibh was also present. At that meeting plans were finalized for the bombing of the *USS Cole* in Aden, Yemen, on October 12, 2000. So just as the cell recruited from Hamburg became deeply immersed in the network that planned attacks in Europe, the Saudi and Yemeni members of the 9/11 cell were linked to the South Asian network and the men who planned and carried out the attack on USS *Cole*.

Hazmi and Mihdhar went to the United States directly from that meeting in Kuala Lumpur in January 2000. In fact, the CIA was aware of the meeting and had been informed that they had attended, but the report was only processed after the two men had already arrived in the United States. It was not known where they had gone to ground.[46] The two men lived in the United States for nearly two years before the attacks, traveling frequently within the United States and going abroad to renew their visas and for other purposes. (The failure of the CIA and the FBI to cooperate on the identification of Mihdhar and Hazmi was identified as a critical failure of intelligence in the investigation of what went wrong.)

The other thirteen hijackers arrived later, the first group less than six months before the attacks in April 2001. They had all attended training camps in Afghanistan in 1999 and 2000. They spoke little English. It is thought that Mihdhar transitioned from being a designated pilot to taking charge of the "muscle" hijackers. Hazmi and Atta allegedly met monthly to coordinate. The others kept moving around the country in small groups. In July 2001, Atta went to a meeting with Binalshibh in Spain to finalize the plans. In late August, they started to buy tickets for the designated flights.

Conflicting accounts have emerged over the years about how Al Qaeda financed the conspiracy. The Hamburg cell's travels to the camps in Afghanistan were likely self-financed, but KSM is known to have made money transfers from various locations and through intermediaries to the hijackers while they lived in the United States. Most of the funds were sent from account holders in the UAE. Ali Abdul Aziz Ali, another of KSM's nephews, probably transferred the bulk of the funds using various aliases. Hanjour may also have received money from his family. A brother of al-Shehhi has been identified as a source of money transfers. In the end, the hijackers had more money than they needed. Three of the hijackers returned large sums of money to contacts in the UAE just before the attacks.

The 9/11 Commission concluded that the 9/11 attacks cost between $400,000 and $500,000 to carry out. In the early 1990s, Bin Laden put staff on his payroll but no evidence has emerged that the hijackers were paid in this way. The hijackers had no jobs while they were in the United States, so where did the money come from? The 9/11 Commission investigators traced money flows through regular bank transactions but the hijackers also had cash on hand the origin of which is not known. KSM regularly transferred money to Atta or had someone do it on his behalf

from bank accounts in the United Arab Emirates. Binalshibh and Jarrah received money from their families, and Binalshibh transferred money from German bank accounts. The 9/11 Commission investigators concluded that there was no evidence that the Spanish Al Qaeda cell provided funding to support 9/11 or the Hamburg plotters. Yet, the Commission also concluded that Mohammed Galeb Kalaje Zouaydi, alias Abu Talha, the Spain-based European financier of Al Qaeda groups sent funds to Mamoun Darkazanli, who knew the Hamburg plotters from the mosque they attended. At the time there was no evidence that Zouaydi provided money directly to Atta or Binalshibh or that any of Zouaydi's funds were used to support the 9/11 plot.[47]

The assessment has now been called in doubt by new information that documents Imad Eddin Barakat Yarkas' involvement in the preparation of the 9/11 attacks. These came to light when the Spanish authorities arrested nineteen people in November 2018. Most of the suspects belonged to a family-run gang that specialized in credit card fraud and terrorism financing. It is now apparent that Zouaydi's ability to rake in illicit funds through crime far exceeded previous estimates. The gang was sending money to an Al Qaeda affiliate fighting in Syria headed by a brother of Zouaydi, the head of the extended family gang. The clan also financed shipments of trucks and missiles to Syria, and provided false passports to volunteers willing to fight. Zouaydi, who was arrested in 2001 in a raid on Yarkas' cell, and convicted on charges of funding Al Qaeda, was released from prison in August 2006. The new charge sheet described a far-reaching conspiracy led by a family whose men drove fancy cars and ran several dental clinics while financing terrorism on a grand scale.[48]

Over the years, evidence has accumulated about the support structures that sustained the hijackers in the United States. A now declassified report from the 9/11 Commission Report investigators identified a Saudi—Omar Al-Bayoumi—who provided assistance to two of the hijackers, Khalid al-Mihdhar and Nawaf al-Hazmi, also Saudis, when they came to San Diego in February 2000.[49] Bayoumi let his American bank account be used for at least one money transfer intended for the hijackers, and let the two future hijackers stay in his apartment and helped them find an apartment for themselves. He then paid their security deposit and first month's rent and hosted a welcome party for them. Was this just the kindness of an immigrant extended to other immigrants? Or was he a facilitator who had been tasked with providing advance support for the two hijackers? Bayoumi was already

the target of a counterterrorism investigation, and although a student, he had access to large sums of money. He was also suspected of being an intelligence officer working for the Saudi government, a rather credible suspicion in view of the Saudi state's well-known interest in spying on Saudi students living in the United States. Declassified documents indicate that the FBI and the CIA extensively investigated the links between Bayoumi and the hijackers after the attacks.

Bayoumi left the United States before the 9/11 attacks and moved to the United Kingdom to study business at a university in Birmingham. He was detained by the British police on the request of the FBI and interviewed but was released and never charged.[50] Interest in Bayoumi and a number of other Saudis linked to the hijackers during their time in the United States before the attacks on September 11 was renewed by a lawsuit brought by the families of 9/11 victims against Saudi Arabia. The suit claims that the Saudi royal family not only knew about the plans for the attacks but were complicit in Bin Laden's scheme.[51] (The suit gained traction in 2016 when Congress passed legislation allowing the victims' families to sue any member of the Saudi government suspected of a role in the 9/11 attacks.[52] The court case is ongoing.)

The 9/11 plotters exploited the openness of American society. The men traveled from flight school to flight school and kept paying in cash. Most of the schools appear to have thought the young men were rich Arabs who were willing to pay for the training for fun. Their behavior did sometimes trigger red flags, but they never stayed in one place long enough to cause suspicions to accumulate and reports to add up.

The exception was Zacharias Moussaoui, a French citizen of Moroccan descent who lived in London for a period and went to the Finsbury Park Mosque. He went to a flight school in Norman, Oklahoma, and then shifted to another school in Minnesota. His story is largely parallel to those of the 9/11 hijackers. He was arrested on August 16, 2001 because his lack of knowledge about flying and aircraft led an instructor at the flight school he attended in Minnesota to report him. He was initially charged with immigration violations. It is often assumed that he was intended to be the twentieth pilot, since one of the teams was "short" a man but he has insisted that he was tasked with a different plot. Moussaoui was a veteran of the camps in Afghanistan and a "Londonistan" regular. Binalshibh transferred money to him from Germany to pay for his lessons and other evidence supports the theory

that he was planning to do "something." Moussaoui himself has made so many statements about his intentions that it is unclear what they really were, but it is now accepted that he was intended for another plot and probably not part of the "planes operation." In 2006, he was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

Why was Bin Laden not stopped?

Years before the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government had been exploring secret diplomatic and military options to get Bin Laden. By late 1997, the CIA was considering plans to kidnap Bin Laden and hand him over to the authorities in Saudi Arabia. At the time, Bin Laden was still thought of as primarily a financier of terrorism and there were concerns over whether or not there was sufficient evidence to convict him in connection with the various attacks in which he was thought to be complicit. The CIA considered recruiting teams of local tribesmen to kidnap him, and were given the green light by the Clinton administration to plan his capture and, possibly, to kill him.[53] However, there was a long-standing ban on the CIA assassinating foreign leaders, and the plans were scrapped. On August 20, 1998, two weeks after Bin Laden's men set off truck bombs at the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, Clinton ordered simultaneous cruise missile strikes on Al Qaeda's base in Khost in Afghanistan and against a factory in Khartoum in the Sudan that was suspected of producing chemical weapons for Bin Laden. The Khartoum factory was later found to be a pharmaceutical plant. In Afghanistan, the strike hit one of Bin Laden's compounds but missed Bin Laden himself.[54] After that Bin Laden moved into the mountains, much to the discontent of his wives.

At this point, the Clinton administration decided that their best hope of capturing Bin Laden would be to work together with the Northern Alliance of Ahmad Shah Massoud (the warlord who was later killed by Bin Laden's agents two days before the 9/11 attacks). Massoud's organization was deeply involved in drug trafficking and was not an ideal partner, but the U.S. had few choices. However, in February 1999, the head of the CIA, George Tenet, received authorization from President Clinton to proceed. A working group of CIA analysts and Special Forces officers was sent to Afghanistan to liaise with the Northern Alliance.

There was still, however, that problematical ban on assassinations. It had been issued in an Executive Order by President Ford and endorsed by Carter and Regan (Executive Order 12333, Section 2.11). Evidently it would preclude Clinton from commissioning the killing of Bin Laden. In February 1999, an ambiguous instruction was forwarded to the Northern Alliance. As summarized in the 9/11 Commission Report this indicated that "the United States preferred that Bin Laden and his lieutenants be captured, but if a successful capture operation was not feasible, the tribals"—a term used to describe local Afghan war lords—"were permitted to kill them."[55]

According to the 9/11 Report, "the tribals" told Gary Schroen that locals had no intention of killing or harming Bin Laden. Indeed, they wanted to prove that they were more "civilized" than the Al Qaeda leader. Schroen, the CIA's man in Afghanistan, described Massoud's reaction to the do-not-kill order: "You guys are crazy." In Schroen's opinion, the effect of the "do not kill" order was rather to discourage Massoud from making a serious attempt to capture Bin Laden.[56] Two years after that failed attempt to "get" Bin Laden, and two weeks after the 9/11 attacks, Schroen led the first CIA team dropped into Afghanistan.

Further strikes against locations where Bin Laden was known to be living were planned in 1999 and 2000 but they were all canceled, mostly because of concerns about civilian casualties, including the risk of accidentally killing Bin Laden's wives and children.[57]

Would negotiating with Bin Laden's host, the Taliban, have dislodged Bin Laden and robbed his organization of its sanctuary in Afghanistan? A high-level meeting between the Taliban and the U.S. Government took place in the spring of 1998. This was before the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Nairobi, but after Bin Laden and his allies had declared war against the United States and the "Crusader-nations." Bruce Riedel, a former CIA analyst who served on the National Security Council under four presidents until 2002, writes that it was the first and only face-to-face meeting between the U.S. government and representatives of the Taliban.[58] The meeting was mediated by the Pakistani government and took place in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. Present were an envoy for Clinton, Bill Richardson, as well as the number two in the Taliban, but not the movement's leader, Mullah Omar. The meeting focused on negotiating an end to the civil war, and getting the Taliban to turn over Bin Laden to the Saudis. The Taliban refused to concede on either issue. They insisted that Bin Laden was their guest, but promised that they would control him.

Declassified memos that are part of the National Security Agency's archive at George Washington University indicate that as many as thirty low-level diplomatic contacts took place between the United States representatives and the Taliban between 1996 and 2001. These diplomatic efforts focused on getting the Taliban to surrender Bin Laden.[59] All were fruitless.

The Taliban regime was not a recognized government and the contacts between representatives of the regime and the U.S. government would have represented a significant reputational risk for both parties had they become public. In November 1998, after the bombing of the U.S. embassies in East Africa, the Taliban asked for a meeting. This took place at the U.S. consulate in Peshawar, Pakistan.[60] Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil was the Taliban representative. (Wakil was foreign minister for the Taliban regime from 1999 until the fall of the regime in December 2001.) On this occasion, the Taliban offered to work with the United States to expel Bin Laden, "although this could not be formally done since the U.S. does not recognize the Taliban." Wakil suggested that a joint Afghan-Saudi commission of *ulema* (religious scholars) might decree that Bin Laden should be returned to Saudi Arabia. He explained that the Taliban would need religious cover if they were to turn Bin Laden over, because "the people" would find it hard to understand why the "great *mujahid*" in the war against the Soviets was being expelled.

In exchange for Bin Laden, the Taliban wanted the United States to help ease Taliban relations with Saudi Arabia. Money was the issue. The Saudis had poured funds into Afghanistan to fight the U.S.S.R. but now the tap had been turned off. It was clear, the Taliban envoy remarked, that they would get much more money from the Saudis for turning in Bin Laden than they would ever get from Bin Laden himself. The Taliban had "heard many times that Bin Laden was rich, but to them he appeared to have little more than enough to feed his family."[61] It is by no means certain that the Taliban seriously considered turning in Bin Laden, but clearly they were looking for ways to persuade the Saudis to start sending money again. They also wanted to avoid further U.S. bombing of targets in Afghanistan. As it turned out, however, the negotiations were about to be overtaken by events. Bin Laden was preparing to give the go-ahead for the 9/11 attacks.

Between January 20 and September 10, 2001, no fewer than forty articles in President Bush's daily briefings from the CIA related to Bin Laden.[62] In January 2001, Clarke requested a presidential policy review of the risk posed by Al Qaeda; the "*al Qida*" network in his terminology. In his memo, Clarke declared that the review was "urgently" needed. However, he evidently felt

that he was at a disadvantage, fighting for attention. Was this not all very far away? "Just Some Terrorist Group?" one newspaper headlined a piece on Al Qaeda. Did it really pose a "first order threat" against U.S. interests in a swath of countries? an aide asked. Was it a matter of "'chicken little' overreaching and can we proceed without major new initiatives [...]?"[63]

On August 6, 2001, a CIA memorandum with the title "Bin Ladin Determined to Strike in U.S." was part of President Bush's daily security briefing. The memorandum was leaked to the press in 2002. It was subsequently declassified and became part of the 9/11 Commission's investigation in 2004.[64] At least eight memoranda with similar titles had been produced for presidential briefings since 1998. They all said essentially the same thing: Bin Laden is determined to strike again; he has sympathizers in the United States; he has active plans to "do something" on U.S. soil. Authors of those memoranda—notably Michael Scheuer, who was head of the Bin Laden unit in the CIA, and Richard Clarke, the counterterrorism coordinator in both the Clinton and the Bush administrations who was in the White House on 9/11—would later blame the politicians for not listening to their warnings.[65]

And yet none of the intelligence assessments foresaw a catastrophic incident on the scale of the 9/11 attacks. The 9/11 Commission concluded that the problem was "lack of imagination," a polite way of suggesting that the people responsible for the country's security had failed to put two and two together.[66] Senior intelligence officials pushed back. Preventing a terrorist attack requires insight into the latest twists and turns of the planning of secretive organizations. This is not always available in good time, in advance of "something" happening. "I don't think that anybody could have predicted that these people would take an airplane and slam it into the World Trade Center, take another one and slam it into the Pentagon, that they would try to use an airplane as a missile," Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, told the 9/11 Commission.[67] But there remained the nagging charge that the foreign policy and security establishments had shown a fatal failure to pay attention.

Assessing the wealth of evidence that Bin Laden was about to attack the United States, The *9/11 Commission Report* concluded: "The system was blinking red."[68] How could it not? That something big was about to happen was an open secret among the Al Qaeda bosses. Biographies of Bin Laden's family and accounts of contemporaries show that by August Bin Laden was giddy with expectation, talking about a "big event" that would cause chaos.

With so many people in the know, it is hardly surprising that the secrecy of the operation was compromised. Top-level Al Qaeda people in Afghanistan sent their wives and children away. Even Bin Laden tried that, but his youngest wife, Amal, refused to go, preferring martyrdom at the side of her husband.[69] News spread in Europe, too. On August 27, 2001, an Al Qaeda financier in Hamburg who was in touch with several of the hijackers called his associate in Madrid, Yarkas, to convey a cryptic message that in hindsight provided advance warning of the imminent attack. And he used a code that meant both men knew about the plans to hijack aircraft.[70]

The United States Goes to War Against Terrorism

After September 11, everything changed. As mentioned above, historically, the United States has fought abroad to avoid fighting at home, and that is what the country did after the 9/11 attacks. "We needed to be at war—aggressively, at war," Senator Bob Graham said.[71] The psychological state of Washington D.C. was such that the President could get anything he wanted from Congress. Two days after the 9/11 attacks the New Yorker writer, Nicolas Lehman, describes an encounter with Karl Rove at the White House. "We are at war," Rove said. "They hate us and our values."[72] A new grand strategy for a new "War on Terror" was formulated with great speed and little deliberation. Even before the state reorganized itself, it went to war.

At 8:30 p.m., President Bush addressed the nation and declared the attacks an act of war. The United States, he promised, would make "no distinction between the terrorists, and those who support them."[73] The full implications of the declaration of a "war on terror" were only dimly perceived at that time, but it was recognized that this was "a new type of war" which could not be fought by military means alone.

The attacks had been planned abroad by a shadowy network and executed by a disciplined team of nineteen kamikaze terrorists, funded by a Saudi millionaire. In cost-benefit terms, the terrorists seemed to have won hands down. The planning and execution of the attacks were later estimated to have cost Al Qaeda about 500,000 dollars. The loss of the World Trade Center building and damage to the surrounding area, including the subway, was estimated at about sixty billion dollars.

The symbolic effect of the attacks was extraordinary. The physical destruction included a world-famous site in the world's financial center and the Pentagon, the very home of the United States' military establishment. Grave weaknesses in national defense strategies had been laid bare. There had been a terrible failure of intelligence. The nature of the threat posed by Bin Laden's international terrorist network had not been understood. In the precise language of the *9/11 Commission Report*, the 9/11 attacks were the consequence of failures of imagination, policy, capabilities, and management on the part the country's intelligence community and government leaders.[74]

Late on the day of the attacks, the president's newly constituted "War Council" convened. The meeting established Bin Laden's responsibility. It was immediately decided to strike Al Qaeda's training camps in Afghanistan and to capture Bin Laden himself. The National Security Council met twice on the following day. Over the weekend, a new doctrine for national security began to be formulated. The *National Security Directive 9: Defeating the Terrorist Threat to the United States* (NSPD-9) was completed on September 18. It called for military options for action "against Taliban targets in Afghanistan, including leadership, command-control, air and air defense, ground forces, and logistics" and "against Al Qaeda and associated terrorist facilities in Afghanistan, including leadership, command-control-communications, training, and logistics facilities," and called for the mobilization of "all elements of national power to do so—diplomatic, military, economic, intelligence, information and law enforcement."[75]

The full document remains classified but on April 1, 2004, the White House released a summary of the directive, which was later presented by Donald Rumsfeld in his testimony before the 9/11 Commission. Rumsfeld testified: "It was the first major substantive national security decision directive issued by this Administration. In fact, the directive was in the administration's drawer before the attacks. It was presented for decision by principals on September 4, 2001, 7 days before September 11th. What changes were made to the content in the aftermath of the attacks is not known. The directive was signed by the President, with minor changes, and a preamble to reflect the events of 9/11, on October 25, 2001."[76]

Three days after the attacks the president went to Congress and obtained permission to go to war against Al Qaeda. *The Authorization for Use of Military Force* (AUMF) was passed by a joint session of Congress on September 14, 2001. It authorized the use of United States Armed Forces against "those responsible for the attacks on September 11, 2001."[77] Only one member of

Congress voted against. When the vote was taken, bodies were still being pulled out of the rubble in lower Manhattan. It was still believed that 6,000 had died, double the final casualty count.

On October 7, 2001, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. It took four weeks to prepare the invasion because the U.S. military did not have a contingency plan for an invasion of Afghanistan. The invasion ended the Islamic Emirate's five-year-long revolution and dislodged Al Qaeda from the country.

On October 26, 2001, six weeks after the attack, Congress legislated a sweeping overhaul of the country's anti-terrorism laws and policies. The act is known as the USA PATRIOT ACT, which is an acronym for the bill's very long real name: *Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism*. It significantly reduced restrictions on intelligence gathering within the United States by law enforcement agencies; expanded the Secretary of the Treasury's authority to regulate financial transactions, particularly those involving foreign individuals and entities; and broadened the discretion of law enforcement and immigration authorities to detain and deport immigrants suspected of terrorism-related acts. The government had not known enough to prevent 9/11. Now the collection of data became an obsession. The act also expanded the definition of terrorism, thereby enlarging the types of activities to which the expanded law enforcement powers under the new act could be applied. Previously, acts of terror had often been prosecuted as murder or sedition, as was the case in the prosecution of the 1993 World Trade Center conspiracy.

Less than a month after the attack, on October 8, 2001, President Bush announced the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to coordinate and expand the responsibilities of the intelligence agencies. In the largest reorganization of the federal government since the New Deal, the department would absorb 187 pre-existing agencies. In 2002, Congress authorized the creation of the new department and passed the Homeland Security Act. A year later the new department opened its doors with 250,000 employees. Homeland Security became the third largest department in the executive branch, after the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.

The catastrophe opened the door to the realization of the administration's plans on a scale that even a few months earlier would have been unthinkable. George W. Bush had been inaugurated as president in January

2001. He and his powerful Vice President, Dick Cheney, had set out to reverse what they saw as a dysfunctional, even unconstitutional, erosion of presidential power that had begun with the limitations imposed on the presidency by Congress in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate. The crisis made Bush, as he would later put it, a "wartime president." Blueprints for rebalancing the relationship between the Executive and Congress were dusted off and adapted to the new context within days of the attacks. Much has been written about the "theory of the unitary presidency," to which the Bush-Cheney administration subscribed, and its consequences for the balance of power between the different branches of the U.S. government. The theories and opposing views on the question of when the president needs to seek the consent of Congress to conduct war are represented in the books of three people who in each their own way became partisans in the constitutional tussle: the Vice-President Dick Cheney writing with his daughter Liz, a U.S. Representative; John Yoo; and Jack Goldsmith. Yoo and Goldsmith are law professors who worked for the Bush administration but ended up on opposing sides of the debates about the reach of presidential authority.[78] Theory aside, President Bush got the authorization to conduct a global "war" that he wanted.

The aphorism that war makes states is a staple of political science. War also gives presidents new powers.[79] This was true of the 9/11 attacks. The dramatic and urgent expansion of war making capabilities and the unparalleled expansion and reorganization of the American state that followed is one of the most important legacies of the 9/11 attacks. Decisions made on the day itself and in the immediate aftermath of September 11 would profoundly reshape the presidency and the American state. There was a widespread uneasy sense that the state had failed to keep the nation safe. Guarding the realm is a key objective of the sovereign state.[80] Fears that a second attack was already in motion loomed large. Having failed to see what was coming once, the possibility that something unthinkable could happen again seemed plausible.

The AUMF granted the president unilateral authorization to use "all necessary and appropriate force" in a new war on "those nations, organizations, or persons" that "he determines" had a hand in the September 11 attacks and "to prevent any future acts of terrorism against the United States." The authorization set no geographical limits on where the use of military force was authorized. It required no pre-approval from Congress for the use of military force. And the authorization had no expiry date.

It did not, however, exempt the president from having to consult with Congress on other types of warfare. The less noticed second paragraph of the AUMF left in place the general restriction imposed on the president by the War Powers Resolution of 1973. The exemption granted from the 1973 resolution applied only to the pursuit of international terrorists. Congress had passed the War Powers Resolution in reaction to the Nixon administration's secret bombing campaign in Cambodia in 1969.[81] The bombings were kept secret from Congress and the public for more than a year. The resolution limited the president's ability to prosecute war unilaterally. U.S. Armed Forces could be sent into action abroad only with authorization from both houses of Congress. An emergency clause was added that allowed quick response in the case of attacks on U.S. territory or its armed forces, but only for sixty days.

The enemy was not named. The president was authorized to go to war against "international terrorism," and in this way the AUMF gave the president and the presidents who have followed Bush license to wage a global war against a many-headed shape-shifting network. It was wise not to mention names. Al Qaeda could change its name and a new Congressional authorization would then theoretically be required required to pursue the organization. But the unintended consequence was that this was a war that could go anywhere and continue until victory was declared.

On October 7, 2001, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in retaliation for the attacks on the United States four weeks earlier. The campaign was launched with the United Kingdom as a partner and the Afghan Northern Alliance as an ally. The objective was to "get" Bin Laden, to deny Al Qaeda sanctuary and bases in Afghanistan, and to topple the Taliban regime. By late November and December 2001 these goals were largely accomplished, with the notable exception that Bin Laden escaped capture.

The international community generally accepted that the invasion was an act of self-defense, and therefore as a legal military action under the United Nation's Charter. The U.N. Security Council issued Resolution 1368 the day after the attacks urging member states to work together to bring the international terrorists to justice. Sixteen days later, the Council issued Resolution 1373 which affirmed the right to collective self-defense, essentially authorizing military action against Al Qaeda under international law. More resolutions followed putting the U.N. squarely in the picture in the fight against Al Qaeda.[82] In December 2001, Council established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF),

which was tasked with training and overseeing the operations of the new Afghan National Security Forces. At a meeting in Bonn, Germany, the coalition partners nominated Hamid Karzai, the leader of the Northern Alliance, to become head of an interim government. Presidential elections were held in 2004, and Karzai was elected president. In 2003, NATO took over military oversight from the United Nations. U.S. troops remained in the country and their numbers grew after the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, mounted an insurgency against the government and the Western troops.

Then, on March 20, 2003, the United States invaded Iraq. This new war won only partial and reluctant support from allies. Over forty countries signed up for the so-called "coalition of the willing" that backed the United States.[83] The long list of allies in the war in Iraq included tiny island nations (e.g. the Solomon Islands) and countries whose support was of symbolic importance, and barely that. Long-standing European allies of the United States remained on the sidelines. Only a few contributed troops, and only Great Britain sent a significant number, 46,000, to join the United States' initial deployment of 250,000.

Official justifications centered on what turned out to be fabricated claims about Saddam Hussein's ties to Al Qaeda and flimsy evidence that the regime possessed weapons of mass destruction (meaning chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear material for use in a "dirty bomb"). Thirteen years later, Colin Powell, the Secretary of Defense in the Bush administration, retracted claims about WMDs and said that they represented a "great intelligence" failure.[84]

Controversy later emerged over how and why the War on Terror was expanded to include Iraq. What we do know is that invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq were mooted in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld allegedly instructed the Chief of the Joint Chief of Staff, General Meyers, to produce contingency plans for striking Iraq on the day of the September 11 attacks.[85] Richard Clarke, who worked as national security advisor for both the Clinton and the Bush administrations, says President Bush asked him on September 12, one day after the attack, to "look into" Iraq's role in the attacks.[86] (Bush would later deny the conversation.) Clarke wrote a report saying there was no evidence supporting the assumption that Saddam Hussein was behind Bin Laden and the attacks. In the end, only plans for an invasion of Afghanistan were made. Taking down Hussein would be postponed for two more years.

Declassified documents reveal that two months after the 9/11 strikes, in November 2001, the secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, was thinking about a move against the Iraqi regime: "How start? Saddam moves against Kurds in north? The U.S. discovers Saddam connection to 9/11 or to anthrax attack? Dispute over WMD inspections? (Start now thinking about inspection demands.)"[87] The notes have been seen as incontrovertible evidence that the administration wanted to go to war against Saddam Hussein and was preparing to use the tragedy of 9/11 attacks as a pretext.

Neoconservatives were gunning for war against Saddam Hussein, assuming, without evidence, that he was the puppet master behind Bin Laden. On September 19, little more than a week after the attack, Gary Schmitt and Thomas Donelly, both from the Project for the New American Century, a think tank in Washington D.C. created by William Kristol and Robert Kagan, wrote in *The Weekly Standard*:

> Defeating the Saddam/bin Laden axis will send a broader message as well. It will deter Iran, Syria, and the other part-time members of the anti-American coalition in the Middle East, and reassure our regional friends. And it will restore the global credibility tarnished in the Clinton years. Both our friends and our enemies will be watching to see if we pass this test. Our tactics should be appropriate to these campaign goals. In going after Usama bin Laden, we will surely have to do more than fire cruise missiles at mud huts. [. . .].[88]

Visions of grandeur and restoration got mixed in with a powerful desire for revenge matched up with the longstanding American doctrine that we fight abroad so not to have to fight at home. Opposition from the Pentagon and from within the Bush administration was so strong that war against Iraq had to wait another two years. Few Americans paid any attention to those voices at the time. The country was grieving and in shock but behind the scenes factions were jockeying for power.

Unintended consequences

Fighting against a movement of international terrorists who recognize no borders means fighting an irregular war against an irregular army. There are inevitable questions about what to do with captives. Are they soldiers? If yes, then international conventions apply. Are they criminals? If so, they should be prosecuted, but what if the evidence is not good enough to satisfy the

demands of the legal system? These are questions that have been answered only gradually, and only in piecemeal fashion, case by case.

In late 2001, American troops and Special Forces found themselves holding many hundreds, if not thousands of captured Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters. These were men no one wanted to see returning to the battlefield to fight another day, but no provisions had been made to deal with them.

A prisoner uprising took place between November 25 and December 1, 2001, in an old fort, Qala-i-Jangi. A CIA official was killed. He was there to identify members of Al Qaeda among the detainees. Among them were a number of "foreign fighters," non-Afghans who had joined the jihadists, and two American citizens: Yaser Esam Hamdi and John Walker Lindh.

In November 2001 there were reports that the Bush administration planned to set up a military tribunal to try enemy combatants.[89] A little-known, disused U.S. naval base in Guantánamo Bay, on the southeastern tip of Cuba, was mentioned. In January 2002, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld officially confirmed the creation of a prison camp there "to detain extraordinarily dangerous people, to interrogate detainees in an optimal setting, and to prosecute detainees for war crimes."[90]

In all, 775 men were taken to Guantánamo Bay. President Obama made a campaign promise to shut the detention center, and over the years the number of prisoners has been whittled down. By January 2017, when the Trump administration took over, forty-one men were left at the facility.[91] Latest reports are that forty are still there. In February 2021, the Biden administration relaunched the effort to close the prison. These men have now been detained for twenty years and are aging. They include KSM, the architect of the September 11 attacks, and Ramzi Binalshibh, the offshore coordinator for the 9/11 hijackers.

In 2009, an announcement was made that KSM and four other co-conspirators in the 9/11 attacks would be tried in federal court in Lower Manhattan. The plan was strongly opposed by the mayor and by members of Congress from the New York City area who feared that trials would make New York a target for revenge attacks by Al Qaeda.[92] Since then, military trials have been conducted in a special courtroom at the detention facility. The detainees have legal counsel and are given the opportunity to speak. Journalists are present but the court can press a mute button that shuts them out when secret information is presented. Trial dates have come and gone.

The timeline for the prosecutions may seem inordinately protracted but this is not out of line with international precedents. Trials on charges of crimes against humanity scheduled before the International Criminal Court in The Hague routinely take upwards of a decade.

Covert warfare and the use of what has become known as a targeted killing program are another controversial legacy of the War on Terror. On September 17, 2001, President Bush approved a memorandum of understanding authorizing the CIA to engage in a covert war against Al Qaeda. This granted the agency "the authority to covertly capture and detain individuals posing a continuing, serious threat of violence or death to U.S. persons and interests or planning terrorist activities."[93]

Cofer Black, who served as director of the CIA's Counterterrorist Center from 1999 until 2002, when he moved to the State Department to become "ambassador at-large" for counterterrorism, summed up the shift in a famous remark made in the course of his 2002 testimony to a congressional inquiry into the causes of 9/11. "All I want to say is that there was 'before' 9/11 and 'after' 9/11. After 9/11 the gloves come off."[94] In a PBS *Frontline* program, Black characterized the new position of the CIA in this way: "in a nanosecond, we're going from where we were staked to the ground like a junkyard dog—you can report, but you can't do anything—to new authorities, new rules of engagement, lots of funding to support this. This is a whole new ball game." The CIA was immediately "all-in," Black said. "Where everybody else is looking for their maps on Afghanistan, we're ready to rock, ready to roll."[95] In 2005, Black moved on from life in government to become vice chairman of Blackwater USA, one of the largest defense contractors active in the Iraq war.

If you go to war against global terrorism, you end up in a global war. According to a 2013 report from the Open Society Foundation, fifty-four countries were found to have assisted the CIA in its covert activities, which included the extra-judicial detention of prisoners. Some foreign secret services participated without legal authorization from their governments.[96]

A Senate Intelligence Committee Study headed by Dianne Feinstein, a Democratic Senator from California, subsequently verified allegations of torture and "black" detention centers abroad. The Committee identified thirty-nine prisoners who had been subjected to torture, but found little evidence of specific and useful information obtained by such means.[97] White House officials allegedly colluded with the CIA in keeping the secretaries of defense and state out of the loop with respect to interrogation techniques and the CIA's detention program.

The Obama administration inherited the campaign against Al Qaeda, but it also had to deal with the legacy of the Iraq invasion. At his inauguration in 2009, Barack Obama reiterated that the country was at war with "a far-reaching network of violence and hatred."[98] But four years later, in a speech laying out his administration's anti-terrorist strategy, Obama invoked the "war on terror" in quotation marks, as if to disown it. Not only was the war on terror stripped of its capital letters, but the tactics changed. Obama promised that the United States would launch "a series of persistent, targeted efforts to dismantle specific networks of violent extremists that threaten America."[99] Drone strikes would decapitate the leadership of the terrorist networks while minimizing collateral damage to local populations. Soon the troops would be brought home.

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Micronesia, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Palau, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Singapore, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, Uganda, and Uzbekistan. The list provided to be subject to revision. Costa Rica dropped out shortly after getting on the list. Spain withdrew after the 2004 bombings in Madrid.

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7

Homegrown Terrorism

In the early morning of March 11, 2004, ten bombs exploded on four commuter trains heading into Madrid's city center. One hundred and ninety-one people were killed and more than 1,800 injured. Three unexploded devices were later discovered in the baggage left on the trains. This was not a suicide attack, but one month later seven suspects died in an apparent suicide explosion when police raided a house in a Madrid suburb.

The attacks took place just three days before a general election was due to be held in Spain. The timing suggested that they were intended to affect the outcome. They certainly did so. The conservative government initially attempted to blame the Basque separatist organization *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (ETA). This proved to be wrong in fact, and politically a mistake. Three days later, Al Qaeda took responsibility.

In Spain, the strike was seen as retribution for Spain's involvement as a coalition partner in the ill-fated invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The election produced a change of government. The Socialist Party took over and withdrew Spain from the coalition of forces backing the United States in the war in Iraq. The bombings were blamed on "homegrown" Islamist militants who had been radicalized by the invasion of Iraq.

Now, years later, due to the careful work of a Spanish researcher, Fernando Reinares, a different story has emerged.[1] The network responsible for the bombings grew out of one of Europe's oldest Al Qaeda cells, based in Madrid. The leader, Imad Eddin Barakat Yarkas, (alias "Abu Dahdah,"), was in prison at the time of the 2004 bombing, convicted on charges related to his role in the 9/11 attack cell but according to Reinares he continued to exercise from behind bars.[2] Another long-term Al Qaeda operative, Amer Azizi (aka Othman al-Andalusi), took the lead role in managing the train bombings. Azizi, a veteran of jihadist fighter groups in Afghanistan and Bosnia, had helped to organize a meeting in July 2001, in Spain, between Mohammad

Atta and Ramzi Binalshibh.[3] Azizi escaped arrest in 2001 when the Spanish authorities cracked down on the support cell for the 9/11 hijackers and since had moved up the ranks in Al Qaeda.

Reinares found that the decision to bomb the Madrid commuter trains had been made in Karachi in December 2001, three months after the 9/11 attacks.[4] This was eighteen months before Spain was drawn into the war in Iraq. (Spain deployed 1,300 troops in Iraq starting in July 2003.) Moreover, the timing of the attacks was settled well ahead of the announcement of the date for the national elections. Therefore, neither the war in Iraq nor the election was a factor. The date was chosen for its symbolic significance, recalling the 9/11 attacks three years earlier. (The Madrid Bombings are known in Europe as 3-11, acknowledging a family resemblance to 9-11.) The operatives responsible for executing the bombing were drawn from the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group (MICG) and its Libyan counterpart (LIFG), and so Reinares concluded that it is not accurate to describe the bombings as an example of "homegrown" terrorism. Finally, the bombings were planned in Karachi, with the involvement of KSM (Khalid Sheikh Mohammed) and other high-level Al Qaeda operatives, to punish Spain for its aggressive prosecution of the Spanish Al Qaeda cell members who participated in the preparation for the 9/11 attacks. (Azizi was killed in a drone strike in Pakistan's tribal regions in 2005. Azizi's Spanish wife and Hamza Rabia, another veteran who had become Al Qaeda's chief for external operations, were killed in the same drone strike.[5])

The following year, again in the early morning, on July 7, 2005, four young men from Leeds, England, drove south to Luton where they strapped on backpacks, each carrying about ten pounds of explosives, and boarded a train to London's King's Cross station. They then dispersed, taking different trains on the underground network. A little over an hour later, three of the men detonated their backpacks and blew up the trains on which they were traveling. A fourth blew his backpack up on a bus an hour later.[6] (Why he ended up on a bus rather than on a train has never really been explained.) The four coordinated attacks killed fifty-two people and injured seven hundred. Two weeks later, on July 21, a second attack took place. This time, the bombs malfunctioned because of their sloppy, homemade construction and the five would-be suicide bombers were arrested. Because it failed, the second attack is often forgotten, but in fact the two bombings were intimately connected. British authorities eventually arrested forty people in connection with them.

Al Qaeda took responsibility, issuing two suicide video recordings featuring the July 7 bombers and Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was then Al Qaeda's second-in-command. The videos had been filmed at camps in Pakistan when the British men were being trained in how to make the bombs. (The explosives were later mixed in a bathtub in an apartment in Leeds.[7]) On September 1, 2005, *Al Jazeera* broadcast a videotape of Mohammad Sidique Khan, the ringleader who died in the July 7 bombings, reading a statement in English. Then al-Zawahiri came on and declared in Arabic: "Like its glorious predecessors in New York, Washington, and Madrid, this blessed battle has transferred the battle to the enemies' land." A year later a second video was released posthumously on *Al Jazeera* featuring a second suicide bomber who took part in the July 7 bombings, Shezad Tanweer, speaking in his broad Yorkshire accent.[8]

Immediately after the July 7 bombings, Sir Ian Blair, head of the Metropolitan Police, and Jack Straw, the foreign secretary, said the attacks bore "all the hallmarks" of Al Qaeda.[9] That would not be the final conclusion. A House of Commons inquiry into the planning of the attacks determined that the suicide bombers were self-financed by means of credit cards and a car loan fraud, that they had mixed the bombs themselves, and that "the extent of Al Qaeda involvement is unclear."[10] A parallel inquiry conducted by the Intelligence and Security Committee also discounted Al Qaeda's role. A vigorous debate followed about the prevention of the root causes of "homegrown" terrorism.

However, in time, evidence emerged of Al Qaeda's role in directing the London Underground bombings. At a military tribunal in Guantanamo Bay in 2007, KSM claimed responsibility. What role he played is unclear since he had been in U.S. custody since 2003, but he claimed to have provided guidance on how to mix the liquids used to make the backpack bombs.[11] Documents recovered by German intelligence in 2012 from a memory stick taken from the underpants (yes, literally) of a traveling jihadist identified another handler of the British suicide bombers: Rashid Rauf, also a British-Pakistani, who had joined Al Qaeda in 2002.[12] In 2004, Rauf accompanied the men from Leeds to the tribal areas in northwest region of Pakistan. There they met with a high-ranking Al Qaeda official, who is assumed to have been Abu Ubaidah al-Masri, another Egyptian who had been with Al Qaeda since its foundation. The young men were given bomb-making training and sent back home—after taping their suicide statements.

The next wave

Al Qaeda incurred heavy losses in Afghanistan in late 2001 from the retaliatory airstrikes on Al Qaeda and Taliban targets. Key military leaders were killed, among them Mohammed Atef, a founding member of Al Qaeda and Bin Laden's chief military commander, who died in a U.S. air strike in Afghanistan in November 2001. In December, the Al Qaeda leadership ordered the troops to flee. However, despite efforts by the U.S. military to block flight routes, some 1,000 Al Qaeda fighters escaped into Pakistan.[13] Bin Laden and Zawahiri got out in December 2001, though only just. On December 14, Bin Laden wrote his will and testament, instructing his wives not to remarry, an unusual stricture, and stipulating how to dispose of his money (most of which was in the hands of the Sudanese government). Al-Zawahiri's first wife and two of his children died in the bombardments. Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri lost access to money and their usual means of communications. From now on money would be tight and they had to depend on human couriers who took their computer files to Internet cafes or delivered letters and messages by hand.

Al Qaeda's control center moved to Waziristan and Baluchistan in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP), a mountainous region bordering Afghanistan.[14] Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri established themselves there, and they were joined by other Al Qaeda operatives and also some leading Taliban officials, among them Mullah Omar, and a motley crew of Taliban, Uzbek and Turkic fighter groups.

They were all welcomed and protected by the Haqqani network, a shadowy, family-run Afghan militia that operated with support from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).[15] Bin Laden had enjoyed the support of the Haqqani network since Al Qaeda's founding in 1988. Al Qaeda fighters were now given (paid for) access to Haqqani training camps in Waziristan. For the following decade, these camps served as a meeting place—a melting pot even—for a new generation of recruits from Europe, Asia, and Africa.[16] It was in these bases in the North West Frontier, and, a few years later, in Iraq, that Al Qaeda regrouped.

With the old guard under lock or key in Iran or in deep hiding in a remote province of Pakistan, a new leadership cadre emerged. They did not come from the old networks of men who had arrived in Europe as refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, veterans of failed Islamist revolutions at home. The new generation of extremists was made up largely of

children of Muslim immigrants to Europe, North America, and Australia. There were also some local converts to Islam. And as they absorbed this new breed of recruits, the movement adapted. Following the train bombings in Madrid (2004) and in London (2005), commentators began to talk of "homegrown terrorism." "Leaderless jihad" was another fashionable phrase, though it was recognized that the local recruits followed a new breed of local leaders. Two charismatic preachers in London came to symbolize the new Islamist counterculture: Abu Hamza al-Masri at the Finsbury Park Mosque, and Omar Bakri Muhammad, who became known in the British press as the "Tottenham Ayatollah."

"Homegrown" terrorism is an awkward term. It refers to acts of terrorism planned or carried out against Western states in the name of Al Qaeda or like-minded organizations by individuals born (or raised) in the West.[17] The concept is problematic, however, and has given rise to much misunderstanding. A more appropriate description of the new template that emerged after 2001 is "transnational terrorism."

Transnationalism is a term used to describe a production process in which successive stages may take place in different countries. Businesses do this to cut costs. Terrorist organizations do it to take advantage of legal loopholes. Proselytizing is generally (within limits) protected in the West as a matter of free speech and religious freedom, whereas access to terrorist training and tradecraft is easier in insurgent zones or in areas where the state is weak or hospitable to terrorist groups. Splitting up the production of the different functions in different territories and using networks to coordinate had many benefits. Growth was one. Protecting the bosses and midlevel management was another. The transnational model also made it easier to exploit weaknesses in national counterterrorism.

The transition from remote-control international terrorism in the style of the 1998 embassy bombings and the 9/11 attacks to the new organization model was gradual. Before 9/11, the most promising recruits were sent to be trained in camps in Afghanistan, in some cases arriving even as Al Qaeda's top brass were sending their wives home, just weeks before the attacks in New York City and Washington D.C. Often, friends went with friends to the camps. The men responsible for the July 7 and the July 21 bombings had been there. If necessary, recruits traveled via Iran.[18] British-Pakistanis and Americans of Pakistani descent used family connection in Pakistan to get a visa, pretending they were going to visit families or going to a wedding (sometimes their own). The tactic proved to be efficient and robust. Within

two years of Al Qaeda's expulsion from Afghanistan the new training centers were flourishing across the border, in Pakistan's tribal areas.

The fight against the Americans in Iraq provided inspiration and direction to jihadists worldwide, and in Europe in particular. But the urban and suburban Western volunteers were not fit for the guerilla-style combat in Iraq. They were recruited by militant sheikhs in Europe, funneled to Al Qaeda's training in camps in what was then known as the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA), in Pakistan, a mountainous region bordering Afghanistan, and prepared for operations in the United States and Europe.

Al Qaeda decentralized. Self-governed affiliates based in insurgent-held enclaves in war zones were branded as new branch organizations. The first was Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and Al Qaeda in 2002. There followed Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which was a reconstituted incarnation of the Europe-based *Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* (in English the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat; GSPC), and the Somali *al-Shabaab*.

The master planner

Some time after the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in East Africa, KSM swore an oath of allegiance to Bin Laden. Three years later, he became head of Al Qaeda's external operations. The title went with responsibility for planning attacks against Western targets, something the KSM had been doing already for years. The position had become available after Mohammed Atef (alias Abu Hafs al-Masri) was killed in a U.S. air strike in November 2001 near Kabul. An Egyptian and a member of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Atef had been the military chief of Al Qaeda since the founding in 1988.

KSM had avoided the flight from Afghanistan in December 2001 because he was living in Karachi, Pakistan. Suddenly, he found himself in control of the organization's bank accounts and among the few men in the top echelon who had the means to communicate with the outside world. His tenure as Al Qaeda's number three lasted less than two years. In March 2003, he was arrested in a raid in Rawalpindi, near Islamabad, Pakistan, after being turned in by an associate in exchange for the bounty promised for information leading to his arrest.

KSM kept many plans going at the same time and drew on a deep well of volunteers from the training camps in Afghanistan for his projects. And yet many of his plots imploded and some failed abjectly. The 9/11 attacks were his signature strike but they were supposed to be just one in a long list of simultaneous coups. Allegedly, KSM had made plans for a hijacked plane to smash into Heathrow airport, or perhaps the House of Commons, while others targeted the Rialto Tower in Australia and the Indian Parliament. None of this happened. KSM had not anticipated that air traffic would be shut down after his successful strikes against commercial airlines.

One of the intended pilots, Abdul Razak Mohammad Afroz, was booked on a Manchester-bound flight out of Heathrow departing later in the day on September 11. He was supposed to hijack and crash the plane into the House of Commons but fled instead to India, where he was arrested. The management of a flight school in the United Kingdom would confirm that, like the hijacker students in the United States, Afroz had wanted to be trained in piloting commercial airliners but appeared to have no specific career ambitions in that direction.[19] Afroz later testified to Indian interrogators that he and two other Indian recruits had trained at the Tyler International School of Aviation in Texas together with two of the 9/11 hijackers. Seven trained pilots were supposedly involved in this plot. They had been recruited from a group of students who used to meet at a militant mosque in Victoria, Australia.

Since these strikes did not come off there is sometimes only sketchy evidence available about what they involved. In some cases the only details come from KSM's own boastful but unreliable list of his achievements. But there were certainly some close calls.

On December 22, 2001, Richard Reid, a London-born Afro-Caribbean convert to Islam, traveling on a commercial flight from Paris to Miami, attempted to detonate a bomb built into one of his shoes. The bomb was made of the plastic explosive pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN), which was not detected when he boarded the plane. Reid failed to light the fuse on the bomb when an alert crewmember emptied a water pitcher over him. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to life imprisonment, and is currently serving his sentence in a high security prison in the United States. Reid was straight out of "Londonistan." A student of Qatada, he had lodged at the Finsbury Park Mosque and attended meetings of an extremist group in London, *al-Muhajiroun*, led by another of the London-based clerics.

Reid was matched with another bomber, Saajid Badat, also British. Badat and Reid were equipped with modified shoes on a trip to Pakistan in November 2001. Allegedly, they crossed into Afghanistan but they may also have been outfitted with their shoes on the Pakistani side of the border. After he returned from his trip, Badat went to the British embassy in Brussels to renew his passport. The use of clean passports was part of KSM's protocol. Badat, however, had second thoughts. He emailed his handler to say he wasn't going to do it and left his shoes on a shelf in his wardrobe.

Forensic analysis showed that the two pairs of shoes containing the bombs were identical "twins." Badat was arrested and was sentenced to thirteen years in prison. He told investigators that in the camp in Afghanistan he met with Richard Reid and with Nizar Trabelsi, the would-be suicide bomber from the German Bundesliga who was supposed to bomb NATO's Kleine Brogel base in Belgium. Badat turned witness for the prosecution and provided evidence against other jihadist terrorists, including giving evidence that was used to convict the plotters of a foiled attempt to detonate bombs in the New York City Subway in 2009.

KSM was more than a planner of attacks. On February 1, 2002, in Karachi, Pakistan, he personally executed Daniel Pearl, a journalist for *The Wall Street Journal*. Pearl was in Pakistan investigating the Richard Reid plot. He was kidnapped and handed over to KSM, probably in exchange for money. During a military tribunal that took place in public in Guantanamo Bay, KSM bragged, "I was responsible for the 9/11 operation from A to Z." He also said that he killed Daniel Pearl, the Wall Street Journal journalist, with his "blessed right hand."[20] A gruesome video made of the execution showed the hands of the executioner, which were later forensically determined to match KSM's.

The man responsible for Pearl's abduction, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, had been involved in the kidnapping of a group of Western tourists in India in 1994. Sheikh grew up in London, the son of Pakistani immigrants, and went to the London School of Economics for a year before dropping out, allegedly in order to go to Bosnia to fight with the jihadists there. CNN once reported that Saeed Sheikh sent 100,000 dollars to Mohammed Atta in the United States from the United Arab Emirates. Chances are the transfer was made on the instructions of KSM, who was accustomed to using an address in the Emirates for his transactions. Atta apparently did not spend all the money and sent the balance back to the account in the UAE, just days before the September 11 attacks.[21] Saaed Sheikh was one of the people

released from jail in December 2000 when members of a jihadist group in Bin Laden's syndicate hijacked an Indian Airlines flight and held the passengers hostage in exchange for a prisoner release.

KSM wasn't done. In April 2002, a young French-Tunisian man, Niser bin Muhammad Nasr Nawar, carried out a suicide attack on an ancient synagogue on the Tunisian island of Djerba, using a big tanker truck. Tourists were the targets, and nineteen were killed. Fourteen were Germans. Hurting the tourism industry was undoubtedly a motive but the chance to blow up a synagogue was likely a bonus for KSM, who was a rabid anti-Semite.

In October 2002, three coordinated bombings on Bali, Indonesia, including one that involved a suicide bomber, killed 202 people. The targets were mostly tourists, the majority of whom were Australian and British. Bin Laden later released an audio claiming responsibility and describing the bombings as "retribution."[22]

In all, according to a partial transcript from a closed-door hearing in Guantanamo Bay, KSM claimed responsibility for thirty-one plots, many of which had multiple sub-plots.[23] After his capture in Pakistan in 2003, KSM was held in secret CIA prisons, the so-called "black sites." KSM is one of the few detainees still held at GTMO. He has been water boarded by the U.S. government 183 times, which is apparently a record.[24] He was transferred to GTMO in September 2006, where he remains.

A new leadership emerged after KSM's arrest. A revolving door of Al Qaeda operatives based in the Pakistani tribal areas took over, among them an American, Adnan Shukrijumah, and the British-Pakistani, Rashid Rauf.

Meanwhile, the London-based sheikhs also struck out on their own. In 2003, two men from Derby in northern England, carried out an attack on a bar in Tel Aviv. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attack but the men, Asif Muhammad Hanif and Omar Khan Sharif, were regulars at the Finsbury Park Mosque and were also involved with *al-Muhajiroun*.

Arrests were made in 2003 in connection with what became known as the Wood Green Ricin Plot, but there were no convictions. The plotters were so hapless that questions arose if there even was a plot. Kamel Bourgass, an Algerian who had been living in the basement of the Finsbury Park Mosque, killed a policeman during the arrests.[25] The plotters attempted to poison commuters in the London Underground by smearing ground ricin beans on railings in the Underground but the powder seemed to have no effect. The prosecution case fell apart. The only person convicted on charges of an attempt to poison commuters was Bourgass, who was also

convicted of murdering the policeman he stabbed at his arrest.[26] (Bin Laden's interest in bioterrorism had been stimulated by an attack carried out in the Tokyo subway system by members of a Japanese cult, *Aum Shinrikyo*, in 1995. Vaporized sarin, or mustard gas, was released into the Tokyo subway during rush hour. Twelve people died and many more were injured. However, ricin proved too difficult to use.)

Dhiren Barot, a British Hindu who converted to extremist Islam while living in London, was arrested together with seven other men in August 2004 in connection with a plot to use limousines packed with bombs and radioactive material to bomb the New York Stock Exchange in Lower Manhattan and the International Monetary Fund's headquarter in Washington D.C. Fears that Bin Laden would get his hands on nuclear material to produce a "dirty" bomb were a consuming concern in the intelligence community. Technically, a "dirty" bomb is one that uses conventional explosives and is stuffed with radioactive material. Such a device could cause radiation poisoning over a large area. The 9/11 Commission Report touched on these fears.[27] Declassified CIA memos from the 1990s, and after the 9/11 attacks provide little substantive information but make clear a concern that Bin Laden would acquire the capability to produce a "dirty bomb."[28] However, the NYSE plotters were not in possession of radioactive material when they were arrested.

Barot was another KSM recruit, via the London-based recruitment centers. As a Hindu convert to Islam, he made an odd figure in the context of the movement. He was also an intellectual. In 1999, he wrote a book about his experiences that was published by a jihadist bookstore in Birmingham.[29] He also produced a thirty-nine-page manual on how to make bombs from materials readily available at hardware stores and pharmacies.[30] He had traveled to the United States on a student visa in August 2000 (the same time as the 9/11 hijackers settled in) to make a reconnaissance of American targets for Al Qaeda. When he was arrested, in August 2004, he was in possession of plans of the New York Stock Exchange, the Citigroup building, and other offices in New York, Washington, and Newark, N.J.

In March 2004, Barot attended a "refresher" terrorist summit with elite Al Qaeda operatives in northwest Pakistan. The attendees included two Americans, Adnan Shukrijumah and Mohamed Junaid Babar, who came with money and supplies. Abu Faraj al-Libbi was also present. He had taken over Al Qaeda's "external operations" (a euphemism for directing attacks targeting the West) after the capture of KSM in 2003. The 9/11 Commission

identified him as "Issa al-Britani," a veteran operative dispatched by KSM to identify economic and "Jewish" targets in New York City.[31]

The shoe-bombers plot, the ricin plot, the "dirty" bomb plot, and another failed attempt to set off car bombs in London outside a disco, the Hanwell plot, and the London Underground bombings were all carried out—or attempted—by recruits living in London who had been to Al Qaeda's training camps either before the exodus from Afghanistan or afterwards, when camps had been reestablished in Pakistan. Many went several times, coming back for advanced courses and specific instructions, and, as in the case of the London Underground bombers, to tape their suicide videos.

The London Underground attacks in July 2005 were twinned with a failed effort to conduct a series of explosions targeting Britain's electric, gas and water networks, several synagogues, and a nightclub. Some plots seem fantastic, but police found that the men had nearly a ton of fertilizer and explosives in a storage facility near Heathrow. The arrests in what came to be known variously as "the fertilizer plot" or the Hanwell Plot occurred before the July 7 and July 21 bombings. The Crown Prosecution Service, which is responsible for prosecuting terrorism cases, imposed a news blackout and the Hanwell plot suspects were not put on trial until well after the July 2005 attacks. The trial itself proved an embarrassment to British law enforcement. The men were monitored and when videotapes of their excursions to various locations in the United Kingdom were played in court it became apparent that the police had footage of the July 7 and the July 21 plotters, but had failed to link them to the other conspirators.

In April 2006, a grainy surveillance video was shown at the trial in London.[32] The footage showed Omar Khyam, a twenty-five-year-old Muslim from Crawley and ringleader of the fertilizer plot, meeting with Mohammed Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, who had both died in the 7 July, 2005 suicide attacks on the London Tube system. The three men had been observed together by surveillance teams in February 2004, sixteen months before the Underground attacks.[33] They were also observed going on whitewater rafting trips together and on other excursions. It was later determined that a poor photocopy made from the video was the reason the important connection between Khyam and Khan was missed. In one of the surveillance tapes, the conspirators were heard discussing plans to blow up multiple aircraft in midair. (There is no evidence that they came anywhere near realizing that objective.[34]) The men, who were tightly knit by childhood

friendship and even a marriage, attended lectures of the two most public figures in "Londonistan," Abu Hamza and Omar Bakri Muhammad.[35]

KSM was quickly replaced by a younger terrorist mastermind. In May 2003, a series of bombings targeted hotels and Jewish sites in Casablanca, Morocco. Fourteen suicide bombers were involved, all locals between the ages of twenty and twenty-three. The strikes were ordered by the new terrorist star, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.[36] He was working with the MICG. The group was, like the GSPC, an Al Qaeda-sponsored organization of expatriate extremists from Morocco living in Spain or elsewhere in Europe.[37]

The Finsbury Park Mosque

The mosque's north London location is near a busy railroad and Underground station, in a mixed neighborhood including enclaves of professionals and immigrant shop keepers. Today the mosque is under new leadership, and it is not implicated in radical Islamist activities. However, for nearly a decade it was the center of a booming extremist counterculture. Two journalists from *The Times* (London) provide a thorough and sobering history of its role in a book entitled *The Suicide Factory*.[38] Because of the presence of a large number of Algerian militants—including operatives who were responsible for the GIA's 1995 bombing campaign in Paris—the French placed an informant in the mosque, who operated under the assumed name of Omar Nasiri, and whose memoirs, *Inside the Jihad: My Life with Al Qaeda*, provide a vivid picture of the sect-like atmosphere around Abu Hamza al-Masri, who controlled the mosque.[39]

Abu Hamza al-Masri, an Egyptian, whose real name is Mustafa Kamel Mustafa, had come to the United Kingdom in 1979 on a student visa, in search of women and opportunity rather than jihad. During his early years in the United Kingdom he worked among other things as a nightclub bouncer. He became radicalized while studying civil engineering at Brighton Polytechnic. He was once a handsome man, and was very fond of women. In 1980 he married a British woman and was able to get British citizenship. He became a certified civil engineer and worked on construction projects in the United Kingdom. In 1985 he divorced his first wife and married a Moroccan-born woman with whom he has seven children. Five of his sons have been arrested and convicted in connection with terrorism charges.[40]

Although Abu Hamza is Egyptian, he was not a member of the Egyptian jihadist groups. He later claimed that it was his first wife, a convert, who brought him to Islam. He was probably baiting the ex-wife. Abu Hamza has said many things over the years that have proven false. In 1987, during a trip to Mecca on pilgrimage during the annual *hajj*, he met Abdullah Azzam, the charismatic organizer of the Afghan-Arab contingent that was fighting against the communists in Afghanistan. Abu Hamza went on to Afghanistan where he had an accident, in which he lost an eye and both hands. He sometimes claimed that he had been wounded fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan. In court, he claimed his injuries happened while he was working with the Pakistani military on a project in Lahore. Whatever, the truth, he made the most of his handicaps. He wore a black eye patch and hooks in place of hand prosthetics. His dramatic appearance was an essential part of his brand.

After his accident Abu Hamza returned to the United Kingdom for medical care, but in 1995 he took off again and went to Bosnia, where he affiliated himself with the Algerian contingent fighting with the *mujahideen*. When, in 1996, the Finsbury Park Mosque was looking for a new imam, he applied. The management committee first offered the position to Abu Qatada, a much better known preacher, but Qatada's salary demands were so exorbitant that the committee passed him over. Abu Hamza got the job. He made himself the loudest public apologist for Bin Laden in London, and in the late 1990s the mosque became a destination for local youths and for a generation of American and European militants hoping to join insurgencies in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Afghanistan.[41] Transient militants, including a group of Algerians associated with Abu Doha, lived in the mosque's basement.

In December 1998 and January 1999, a posse of Britons belonging to Abu Hamza's group, Supporters of Sharia (SOS), was arrested in Yemen. They planned to kidnap tourists and to hold them hostage against the release of militants belonging to the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army, also known as The Islamic Army of Aden (IAA).[42] Sixteen tourists were kidnapped, but government forces attacked the group. Four of the hostages, all Britons, were killed. Among those convicted and incarcerated in Yemen in connection with the Aden plots were ten Britons, including two of Abu Hamza's sons. They were returned to the United Kingdom after completing their sentences.

In 1999, Abu Hamza embarked on a project to set up a training camp for his followers in Bly, Oregon. Three of his followers, Haroon Aswat, Earnest

James Ujaama, and Oussama Kassir were sent to the United States get the job done.

It is unclear how and why Abu Hamza had settled on this particular rural property in Oregon. The attraction may have been the isolation and the easy access to military-grade weapons in the United States. Ujaama, an American who had been to the Finsbury Park Mosque and helped Abu Hamza develop a website in the late 1990s before going to Afghanistan, had promoted the property. But Kassir was in for a disappointment. A local Oregon newspaper reported on ranch and, after speaking with the locals, wrote about the encounter with the British would-be training camp managers:

> Oussama Kassir, a self-proclaimed al-Qaida tough guy, flew into a rage after his late-night arrival at a remote Oregon ranch. The barren rangeland, suggestive of Afghanistan, was to become an Islamic fighter training base…He expected to be welcomed by Muslim recruits, eager to learn the ways of war. Instead, he got an Islamic leader from Seattle, a mentally impaired 18-year-old, and two women more interested in canning jars than jihad. Kassir expected access to a weapons armory. He got one pistol and a .22-caliber rifle.[43]

Oussama Kassir seems to have thought that he could make money off the jihadist time-share ranch in the Oregon hinterland. He put together the connections and persuaded Abu Hamza of the plan's merits. When they were out West, inspecting the ranch, Kassir and Aswat addressed select audiences in mosques. They talked up martyrdom and demonstrated how to assemble and disassemble an AK-47. Aswat later went on to Afghanistan to join Al Qaeda's al-Farouq training camp. He was in Afghanistan at the time of the 9/11 attacks and escaped to Karachi, Pakistan, where his name has been found in a ledger at a guesthouse for Al Qaeda members. (KSM used the same safe house.)

Abu Hamza's reign at the Finsbury Park Mosque was funded by a mafia-like crime network: the making and selling of stolen passports, drivers licenses, and ID cards, scams, credit card fraud, robberies, and extortion of money from businesses in the area.[44] The French-Algerian undercover agent known by the alias of Omar Nasiri, who in the mid to late 1990s infiltrated the Algerian network linked to Al Qaeda in Europe, spent time in the mosque. His account of his life working undercover for the French and then the British security agencies has detailed portraits of Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza. His verdict on the two was that Qatada was a "true scholar" but Abu Hamza just a "demagogue."[45] That was the prevailing assessment among security officials, who thought Hamza was a buffoon. It probably caused

them to underestimate him. But some of the earliest violent conspiracies emerging from London involved the Algerian émigrés who had close ties to Abu Hamza. Members of the so-called Roubaix Gang, the group of Bosnian GIA veterans who conducted violent robberies and attacks on French police in Northern France in 1996 (see Chapter 5), were in residence at the mosque. Two central figures of the gang, Lionel Dumont and Christophe Caze, had religious instruction from Abu Hamza in London.

The mosque was raided in 2003 and Abu Hamza evicted after the plot to poison commuters by distributing ricin in the London Underground unraveled. He continued to preach to his followers in the streets outside the mosque, making street theater out of the demonstrative piety displayed by his followers. He was arrested in May 2004 and convicted in 2006 on charges related to hate crimes and anti-Semitic speech. The London court sentenced him to seven years after which he could be extradited to stand trial in the United States. A long court battle followed. It ended only in 2012, when the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, the last court of appeal in Europe, decided that Hamza could be extradited to stand trial in the United States on charges related to the failed terrorist training camp at the ranch in Oregon and his involvement in the kidnapping of American and British tourists in Yemen in 1998 that led to the deaths of four of the hostages.[46]

Abu Hamza was a recruiter and groomer of a generation of Britons recruited to the ranks of transnational terrorism. He made the mosque in north London into the "Grand Central Station" of travelers wishing to go places to "do something." He could have been charged with any number of terrorism crimes in the United Kingdom, but the government chose to try him on speech crimes. In the end, it was his early crimes in Yemen and in Oregon that stuck. In January 2015, a federal court in the Southern District of New York sentenced him to life in prison. He is now held in a high security prison in Colorado.

The three men who had been deputized to set up the camp were also sent to prison. The last to stand trial was Aswat, a British citizen who was also a regular at the Finsbury Park Mosque. Aswat grew up in Dewsbury, Yorkshire. He fought with a jihadist group in Kashmir and at some point also joined the jihadist brigade in Zenica, Bosnia. Aswat was eventually arrested in Zambia in 2005 and transferred to the United Kingdom. He fought extradition to the United States for ten years but was eventually extradited. In 2015, he pled guilty in a federal courtroom in New York to having spent six weeks in Oregon and in Seattle, Washington, trying to set up a training camp in the United States on the orders of Abu Hamza.[47]

In October 2015, more than fifteen years after the failed enterprise in Oregon, he was sentenced to twenty years in prison. Kassir, a Swedish citizen of Lebanese origin with a long rap sheet that included trafficking in drugs and firearms, was sentenced to life in prison. Ujaama pled guilty a series of minor charges and was given a two-year sentence. Then, he ran off to Belize. He returned to the United States to provide evidence against Abu Hamza. In 2015, he walked out of prison and promised to start a new life.

Al-Muhajiroun

The Finsbury Park Mosque attracted huge attention in Hamza's heyday, but it was soon eclipsed by a new organization: *al-Muhajiroun* (The Emigrants). The Syrian-born Omar Bakri Muhammad, whose real name is Omar Bakri Frostock, was the founder and leader of the group. He too occasionally worked out of the Finsbury Park Mosque. He claims to have formed the group in 1983, when he lived in Saudi Arabia.[48] Apparently, he formed the group after a dispute in *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, another extremist organization to which he then belonged. Saudi authorities allegedly banned his organization and arrested him. Upon his release, he moved to London in 1986 where he relaunched *al-Muhajiroun*.

By 1997, Bakri Muhammad had a clique of loyal followers in London and began to set up affiliates across the United Kingdom. Meetings were often held in church or Quaker halls, which in London are typically available for organizations to rent. Bakri Muhammad subscribed to a proto-Leninist theory of organization, and required core members to pay tithe (fees) and to follow strict rules that applied to all members of the "saved sect," another name used by the group. Members were forbidden to take ordinary jobs or to maintain contact with people who did not convert to the true faith. The organization was once estimated to have 5,000 members, but the core group probably never exceeded more than a few hundred.

After the 9/11 attacks, Abu Hamza and Bakri Muhammad provided the recruits and the organization to rebuild Al Qaeda's networks in Europe. Both men preached at the north London mosque, but on alternate days. The authorities seemed to believe that they were rivals, and they took turns to give information about each other in meetings with investigators from the Metropolitan Police. In reality, however, they collaborated.

Al-Muhajiroun went through many incarnations. It has been compared to the tricks used by businesses wishing to hide their income in tax havens: you

open one box only to be led on to more and more boxes of incorporated affiliates. In 2004, Bakri Muhammad disbanded the organization, anticipating that it was about to be banned by the British authorities. However, groups proliferated under new names. Sub-emirs in the organization set up affiliates. Terrance (Khalid) Kelly created a branch of the organization in Ireland. Another convert, Abu Izzadeen, became an infamous recruiter. He was born Trevor Brooks, in east London, to Jamaican parents and grew up Christian. Izzadeen had status: he had traveled to the camps in Afghanistan prior to the 9/11 attacks. He became the leader of the *al-Muhajiroun* front known as *Al Ghurabaa*. He and his colleague, Anjem Choudary, another early follower of Bakri Muhammad, stayed in touch with their old leader. They traveled to Lebanon when Bakri Muhammad relocated to Beirut.[49] Choudary became the emir of Sharia4UK, another reincarnation of *al-Muhajiroun*, and oversaw the expansion of the organization across Europe.

In 2005, the British Home Office revoked Bakri Muhammad's residency permit. He had already left the United Kingdom, perhaps in anticipation of being arrested, and settled in Lebanon. He continued to meet with followers online but, after years of cat-and-mouse games with the Lebanese authorities, he was sentenced in October 2014 to six years in prison. The charges were related to his founding of a Lebanese affiliate of the Nusra Front, the Al Qaeda-linked Syrian terrorist group. (Two of his sons were killed fighting for the rival group, the Islamic State.) In 2009, he named his disciple, Anjem Choudary, "European *emir*" of a re-launched version of *al-Muhajiroun*. Choudary and his consortium are discussed in Chapter 11.

Beyond the sheikhs and their organizations, a network of preachers, bookstores, and mosques emerged in London and beyond. Bakri Muhammad began to find adherents in the outskirts of greater London, in Slough and Walthamstow, as well as Luton, about an hour by train from the capital. Between 1999 and 2004, individuals with ties to the Finsbury Park and the *al-Muhajiroun* networks were linked to a long list of murderous jihadist activities inside and outside the United Kingdom. Ahmed Ressam and his associates, who were responsible for the L.A. airport and the Strasbourg Christmas plots, spent time at the Finsbury Park Mosque. So did the shoe-bombers, Richard Reid and Sajid Badat. Two men who carried out an attack on a bar in Tel Aviv, Asif Muhammad Hanif and Omar Khan Sharif, were involved with both the mosque and *al-Muhajiroun*. Siddique Khan and Shezad Tanweer were followers of both Bakri Muhammad and Abu Hamza. Bourgass, from the failed 2003 Ricin Plot lived in the mosque and attended

Bakri Muhammad's meetings. Badat and Reid were also followers of Bakri Muhammad. And they went to the Finsbury Park Mosque.

Abu Hamza and Omar Bakri Mohammad lacked the pedigree of having fought in Afghanistan or a personal connection with Bin Laden himself. But they did speak English, which Abu Qatada never mastered fluently. The two men became corner stones of the public "Londonistan" scene also because they mastered eluding law enforcement and imprisonment better than most conmen—and, always, staying in the public eye. They pioneered the right language, which for lack of a better term may be described as pidgin Salafism, for translating the ideas and obligations of global *jihad* to a generation of young Muslims and converts to Islam who spoke no Arabic and had no previous education in Islam. Theirs was an action-oriented creed that promised status and comradeship. The Finsbury Park Mosque and the wider jihadist counterculture in London became a destination for a generation of new militants who went there to make contacts, to marry women in the movement, and to get preapproval for their trips to the camps in Afghanistan, and later, to Pakistan. Where the money came from remains a mystery. The route to Afghanistan at that time went through northern Iran, an old route also taken in the past by hippies and hashish smugglers.

Who was *really* in charge?

Was "Londonistan" a branch off the Al Qaeda tree? Who was in charge? Hoping to answer these questions, I worked with my student team to document, classify and code the identities and the work descriptions of 484 members of the British Al Qaeda-related network between 1998 and 2011.[50] The chosen timeframe brackets the pickup in travel from Europe to Bin Laden's training camps and the transition to the Syrian civil war recruitment campaign. British militants began to travel in significant numbers to the camps in Afghanistan in and around 1998. They turned up again, volunteering for the armed struggle in the training camps after 2003, when Al Qaeda reestablished itself on borrowed territory in North West Pakistan. Most of the volunteers were turned around and told to "do something at home." But they were far from being "leaderless." British militants may have been radicalized through domestic networks but it took the direction and coordination exercised by Al Qaeda operatives linked to the senior leadership to turn them into effective operatives.

The selection criteria for inclusion in the analysis were: (1) the individual had to have British citizenship, or (2) be a resident of the United Kingdom during some or all of the period, or (3) had been identified as a participant in a conspiracy carried out in the United Kingdom.

Adapting management job descriptions laid out in a business school manual, we defined five levels of job responsibilities in the organization. The 484 members of the network were then assessed individually, and their jobs classified according to whether or not they gave or took orders, and what their responsibilities were. If they were responsible for more than one plot, they moved up in the hierarchy. If they only took orders, they went down the ranks. We then assigned an occupational classification to all of the individuals in our database.

The result of the classification of the occupational hierarchy by age, ethno-religious origin, and legal citizenship are displayed in Table 7.1. The top level of "senior management" (level 1) was small and highly selective. Even though this was the management diagram for British-based operatives and their plots, the senior officials were all Arab or Egyptian. This is hardly surprising since prior to the United States-led intervention in Afghanistan in 2001, Al Qaeda Core, or the "senior leadership" as I have called it here, was made up largely of Egyptians and Arabs. Al Qaeda, it would seem, valued seniority. And perhaps there was an element of ethnic favoritism.

At level 2 are the vice-presidents in charge of operations across several countries. They took orders from the senior management and may be described as transnational agents. Project managers make up level 3. They may personally have met Bin Laden but for the most part they worked on particular operations. Their projects were not necessarily violent plots (although they often were), but include, for example, fund-raising or propaganda. On level 4 (not depicted in the sociogram displayed in Figure 7.1) were staffers who carry out suicide actions or undertake support activities. They do not supervise other members of the network. At the bottom of the hierarchy (level 5) are contract workers for whom we have no evidence of a long-term engagement with the movement, e.g., girlfriends, or common criminals convicted of providing support for terrorist actions.

As one would expect, a distinct age pattern emerged from the analysis. The median year of birth for the top leadership (Level 1) was 1963. The median year of birth for the local or regional project managers (Level 3) was 1973. So, the leadership was on average ten years older than the project

Table 7.1. Occupational positions in the Al Qaeda firm. Year of birth, national origin, and legal citizenship by position, 1998–2011.

Occupational position	N	Mean YOB (SD)[a]	Ethno-national origin[b]	Primary legal citizenship[c]
Level 1. AQ senior leadership.	16	1963 (9.45)	Egyptian 4, Pakistani 3, Saudi 2, Somali 1, Other Arab 6	Egyptian 4, Saudi 2, Pakistani 2, American 1, British 1, Spanish 1, Somali 1, Other Arab 4
Level 2. VPs in charge of external operations, transnational or national.	22	1965 (7.16)	Algerian 3 Egyptian 3, Syrian 3, Pakistani 3, Saudi 2, Moroccan 1, French-Moroccan 1, Other Arab 5	British 6, Egyptian 2, French 2, Algerian 2, American 1, Moroccan 1, Spanish 1, Tunisian 1, Other Arab 5
Level 3. Local or regional project managers.	53	1973 (7.62)	Pakistani 14, Algerian 7, Bangladeshi 4, Indian 4, British 3, Tunisian 3, Jamaican 2, Ethiopian 1, French-Algerian 1, Other Arab 10	British 28, Algerian 5, French 3, Egyptian 2, Pakistani 2, Tunisian 2, Moroccan 2, American 1, Bangladeshi 1, Belgian 1, Dutch 1, Jamaican 1, Other Arab 2
Level 4. Full-time staff, no responsibility for supervision.	371	1979 (8.36)	Pakistani 82, Algerian 66, Moroccan 20, Bangladeshi 16, Somali 15, Libyan 14, British 11, Indian 9, Other Arab 31, African 19, Other European 10, Caribbean 6, Other 4	British 177, Algerian 55, French 17, Pakistani 13, Libyan 9, Moroccan 9, Danish 4, Somali 4, Swedish 4, Tunisian 4, Egyptian 3, Indian 3, American 2, Dutch 2, Ethiopian 2, Spanish 2, Ugandan 2, Canadian 1, German 1, Ghanaian 1, Serbian 1, Other Arab 6
Level 5. Casual labor, subcontractors with no lasting involvement in the firm.	23	1982 (11.95)	Indian 7, Pakistani 4, Sudanese 3, British 1, Other 4	British 15, Indian 4, Saudi 2, Pakistani 1

N = 485. [a] Missing Values = 67; [b] Missing Values = 79; [c] Missing Values = 50.

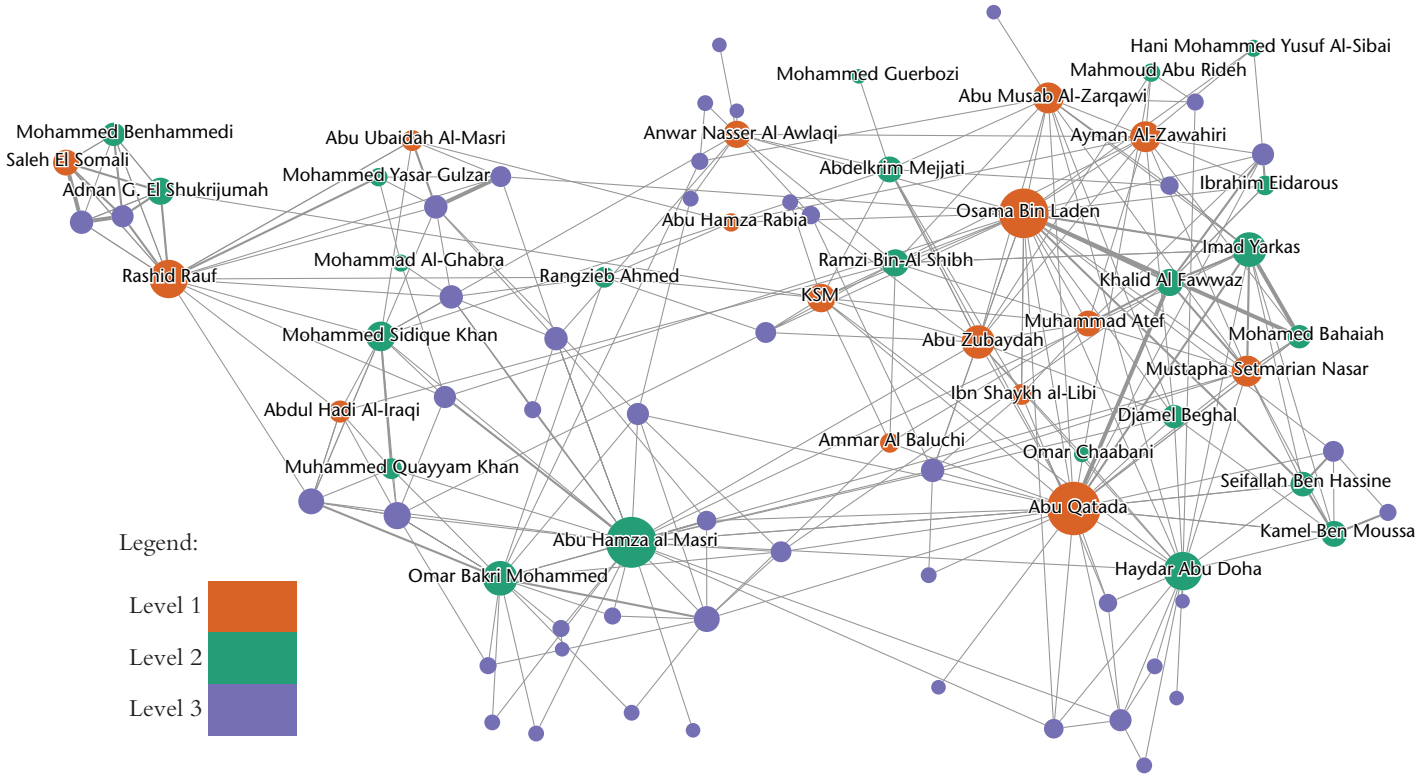


Figure 7.1. Network graph of Al Qaeda management links to British Jihadists, AQ Core, section heads, and project managers only, 1998–2011.

Notes: Node N = 86. Edge N = 352 (Displayed.)

Source: Data from the Western Jihadism Project. Created in Gephi by Rosanne Libretti.

managers. The lowest level workers in the network (Level 5) were, measured by the median year of their birth (1982), on average almost twenty years younger than the top bosses in the network.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test for age differences among the occupational categories. Age ranges differed significantly across the five categories but the finding of a clear age difference between leaders and those on the lower rungs of the hierarchy and followers was still significant and robust ($p < 0.001$). Pairwise check comparisons highlighted significant differences between senior leadership and vice-presidents, on the one hand, and staffers and contract workers on the other. However, the standard deviation for the age statistics was high, ranging from seven to nearly twelve years.

Britons and British-Pakistanis were strikingly over-represented in the lower occupational categories of the London-based networks. Overall, what is particularly noticeable is (a) the role played by Arabs in Bin Laden's closest circles, and (b) the recruitment at the local level of a generation of younger British Pakistanis. Arabs were overrepresented in proportion to non-Arabs among the senior leaders and vice-presidents and the difference was significant ($\chi^2 = 15.09$, $p < 0.001$). Pakistanis, on the other hand, were the single largest group represented among local project managers and full-time staffers.

At the bottom of the hierarchy were the converts. We identified thirty-six converts, none of whom belonged to the upper management. Six were project leaders. Twenty-eight were staffers. (Two were recruited as casual labor.) Among the converts, fifteen were ethnically British, another four were ethnically European, eight were Afro-Caribbean, and one was an Indian of Hindu origin. Women participated only as staffers (ten) or casual labor (seven). They were all wives or girlfriends of male activists.

The analysis made it clear that the British network was markedly hierarchical and made up of an alliance between older—sometimes even elderly—expatriate recruiters and managers, veterans of Arab extremist groups, and a much younger generation of English-speaking British-Pakistanis, Afro-Caribbean converts, and a few white-European converts to Islam.

The stratified occupational structure revealed an ethnic and racial status system. There were no women in this particular organizational eco-system, although women were beginning to emerge as important nodes in the networks in other countries. The second-generation homegrown Britons rarely achieved promotion to senior leadership positions. British-Pakistanis

revitalized Al Qaeda's European operations after the American assault on Al Qaeda after 9/11, but they ended up, at best, as middle managers in Bin Laden's company. The difference between the proportion of Britons in upper management and in middle management and staff positions was significant ($x^2 = 16.84$, $p < 0.001$).

Taking the analysis a step further, we isolated the top management—the senior leadership, the vice-presidents, and the project managers—and created a sociogram of the structure of connections within the management, using Freeman's Degree Centrality. The resulting diagram represents a condensed snapshot of the management structure that tied together British operatives and their Al Qaeda handlers between 1998 and 2011 (see Figure 7.1). The terminology and the methodology used in the analysis are described in greater detail in the Appendix.

The graphic illustrates the extent to which Al Qaeda was still able to call on an effective cadre of project managers and higher-ups capable of running interference between the upper leadership and operatives on the ground after the expulsion from Afghanistan in late 2001.

Some of the people in the diagram died or were incarcerated during the twelve-year period covered by the data. They are nevertheless included here as nodes because, for a period, they were agents in the network. Sometimes plans hatched before their deaths or arrests came to fruition after they were incarcerated or died.

The network diagram graphically depicts a complex "hub-and-spoke" structure. The second-in-command operatives who manage several plots represent the hub of the wheel. The spokes, represented by the links in the diagram, connect to the hub operatives ("nodes") and project managers responsible for the individual plots.

This type of network contrasts with the more common control-and-command structures associated with hierarchies, in which the important communications pass up or down, from one level of authority to the next, rather than between mutually independent hubs and a replaceable manager. Flat networks, where no one is in charge, and the work description is the same for all nodes, represent another variant. These are all different from "leaderless" networks, which are made up of unconnected small groups. Direction may be supplied by imitation, but no higher ups connect and steer the autonomous cells.

The "wheel" network structure allows the core leadership to coordinate and control information flows. It also gives some cover to lower-level

operatives if the leadership structure is eliminated. These qualities adapt the network to the needs of a transnational organization whose leaders and low-level agents may have to operate in different jurisdictions. The lower level operatives can manage things on their own when necessary. If they fail, other cells should have some protection against disruption and may be able to go ahead on their own. The higher-ups may be replaced as they become incapacitated, for instance through drone attacks or arrests. In sum, "wheel" networks combine centralization of management and decentralization of execution. In many regards, they represent an ideal model for clandestine coordination.[51]

In a strict hierarchy, the organization is "pillared." All communications pass down and, to a lesser degree, up through the hierarchy. A consistently hierarchical management structure would seem ill-suited to making adaptations and adjustments to local conditions. "Wheel-based" management structures represent a compromise between command and control and local self-management.

The British network was not an example of "homegrown" terrorism. It was effectively managed and not in any way "leaderless." A cell-like structure provided for decentralization and self-management on the ground but tied the cells in to one agent—a vice-president in our nomenclature—who managed several independent cells and fostered horizontal interaction between them. This might be described as a model for the type of agile management promoted in business schools and by management gurus. It allows for innovative direction from the top while making room for local initiative and empowering local managers to figure out how to execute a project.

Operatives based in Pakistan managed attacks in Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Morocco, Scandinavia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States carried out by homegrown militants. Preachers and proselytizers radicalized and mobilized the men—and a few women—who then traveled to Al Qaeda's training centers, initially and Afghanistan and after 2001 in Pakistan. There, they establish contacts with operatives who guided them through what was to be done.

Counterterrorism evolved, too. The first strikes targeting high-level Al Qaeda operatives using what is technically known as unmanned combat aerial vehicles—armed "drones"—were used in Afghanistan in 2001. The technology changed the dynamics of the war on terrorism by making it possible to target the leaders selectively. After 9/11, being a vice president for

operations was the most dangerous position in the global Al Qaeda organization. The successive elimination of high-level Al Qaeda operatives and their replacement shows up in the graphic depiction of the management network as a sequence of interchangeable hubs. After KSM's arrest, Abu Faraj al-Libi took over as Al Qaeda's head of international operations. He was captured in 2005 and transferred to Guantanamo Bay. An Egyptian, Said al-Masri, also known as Mustafa al-Yazid, took over from him, although it is not clear that his job description matched that of al-Libi. Al-Masri claimed a role in the bombing of the Danish embassy in Islamabad in July 2008, which was branded as retaliation for a Danish newspaper's publication of cartoons of the Muslim prophet in 2006.[52] He was killed in 2010.

Clearly, Al Qaeda was no ordinary firm but nor was it a leaderless social movement. Power and influence networks as well as the social norms and rules of the global *jihad* organization confined the Westerners to well-defined subordinate positions. All parts of the movement were subordinated to the control and the interests of the founders and their designated heirs.

An example is the subgroup revolving around Rashid Rauf, the British-Pakistani manager of the London Underground bombers discussed earlier in this chapter. Rauf was a British citizen and grew up in Birmingham. In 2002, he relocated to Pakistan. By 2004, he had moved up the ranks and for a period served as Al Qaeda's chief of external operations for the West, KSM's old post. Rauf was allegedly the coordinator of the failed Crawley plot, the July 7 and July 21 London Underground bombings, and a foiled plot from 2006 to use soda bottles to bring liquid bombs on board transatlantic aircraft. (That plot is the reason no one can now bring soda or water bottles through airport security.) He met or communicated with several members of each group of plotters during their stays at a training camp in Pakistan.[53] He was also linked to plots targeting Manchester area nightclubs and shopping centers in the Easter period in 2009, and to the attack on the New York City subway on the anniversary of 9/11 a few months later. Rauf worked with other Western operatives, among them Najibullah Zazi, who was convicted of planning to bomb the New York City Subway in 2009, and who was directly managed by Al Qaeda.

Rauf was reported dead or arrested multiple times but in 2012 his family confirmed that he had died in a drone strike, probably in November 2008. He was replaced by Saleh al-Somali, who occupies the node next to Rauf in the sociogram. After al-Somali was killed in a drone attack in December

2009, he was replaced by Adnan el-Shukrijumah, an American, who is also depicted in the network diagram.[54] Rangzieb Ahmed, another British citizen, replaced Shukrijumah. Ahmed lived in Pakistan until his arrest in 2006 and deportation to stand trial the United Kingdom. He was convicted of "directing terrorism as a member of al-Qaeda" and was given a life sentence in December 2008.[55]

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Europe

"Londonistan" overshadowed all the other hubs in Europe, but extremist countercultures grew up across Europe during those first ten years after the 9/11 attacks. Militant hubs emerged in Amsterdam, Brussels, Lyon, Toulouse, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Milan, and Ulm, as well as in North America, in a suburb of Toronto, and in Queens, New York. Several of these groups launched online programs to keep the activists engaged. Small, isolated cells provided a base for a new generation of activists in Europe and in the United States and Canada. They made contacts and offered their services to Al Qaeda—and from 2003 on to Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)—and the savvy westerners used their computer skills to conduct online jihad.

Belgium

The Molenbeek district in Brussels attracted much attention after the coordinated commando-style attacks in Paris in November 2015 in which 130 people were killed. The Islamic State directed and organized the attacks—and follow-up attacks in Brussels in March 2016—but the perpetrators were mostly natives of Molenbeek. The seeds for this extraordinary attack network had been planted a decade earlier, but during that first decade after the 9/11 attacks the local Belgian militants were focused on going abroad and giving support to the armed struggle elsewhere.

Belgian-based militants congregated in the *Centre Islamique Belge* (CIB) in Molenbeek and made Brussels a hub for the recruitment of young French-speaking militants who were seeking to join foreign insurgencies. A central figure was Malika El Aroud (aka Oum Obeyda), a Belgian woman of Moroccan origin who spent time in Afghanistan and claims to have met with Osama Bin Laden. She was married by the imam at the mosque, Bassam Ayachi, to Abdessattar Dahmane, the suicide bomber who killed

Ahmed Shah Massoud in Afghanistan a few days before the 9/11 attacks. Her website, *Minbar* SOS, attracted aspiring holy warriors, including several French-based recruits. Parallel networks of her "*Filières Afghanes*" (Brothers for Afghanistan) appeal sprang up in both Belgium and France.

El Aroud was arrested four times, first in connection to a plot to bomb a NATO airbase in Belgium in September 2001. Her second husband, Moez Garsalloui, was also sent to prison. In 2007, she was also involved in a plot to free the would-be NATO base suicide bomber, Nizar Trabelsi, during a court hearing in Strasbourg, and in a suicide attack plot in Brussels that was planned to coincide with a EU summit a year later. In May 2010, she was sentenced to eight years in prison. Long an Al Qaeda loyalist, El Aroud transferred her allegiance to the Islamic State in 2014, as did most of the militants recruited from the Molenbeek neighborhood. She was stripped of her Belgian citizenship in 2017. She has been fighting deportation to her native Morocco.

The Brussels-based network was strongly ethnic—mostly Algerian and Moroccan—but the French and Belgian militants generally spoke French and Arabic. (Flemish-speaking Belgians gravitated rather towards the Dutch group.) (Chapter 11 describes the Franco-Belgian network responsible for the attacks in Paris and in Brussels in 2015 and 2016 in detail.)

Germany

After the 9/11 attacks a new generation of German militants emerged who developed their own contacts to an Al Qaeda affiliate in the Pakistan's northwest border territory and who had little contact with the jihadist growth centers in London or, for that matter, elsewhere in Europe. A more detailed discussion than I can provide here is found in Guido Steinberg's excellent account of the German networks.[56] Beginning in the winter of 2006–2007 German jihadists, some of whom had Turkish backgrounds, joined Al Qaeda-affiliated Uzbek groups located in Waziristan: the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IJU is a coalition of jihadist groups from Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states closely aligned with Al Qaeda.

However, a few returned to plot attacks at home.[57] Several violent plots emerged from the network. The first was the Sauerland plot, in the fall of 2007. A group of Germans in their late teens, mostly of Turkish and convert

backgrounds, radicalized at the Multikulturhaus Mosque in Neu-Ulm, planned to explode peroxide-based car bombs in several locations in Germany, including the Frankfurt airport and U.S. Ramstein airbase. The cell acquired 735 kilograms of 35% hydrogen peroxide with which they were going to produce a massive bomb: but they did not know that the German police had drained their drums and replaced the chemical.

A German convert and friend of the Sauerland cell, Eric Breininger, created an IJU splinter group in the fall 2009 with the blessing of the Afghan Taliban. This group was specifically designed to attract German militants in Waziristan, the German Taliban *Mujahidin* (GTM). Breininger bragged online that, "this group is a home for all German-speaking Muslims who can come here from all over the world to fulfill their duty toward Allah and fight."[58] Linking up with the Uzbek branch of the global jihadist movement was more natural than joining any of the Arab-speaking groups. Uzbek is a Turkic language, and many of the German militants were of Turkish or Kurdish background. They and their German associates who had converted to Islam as part of their radicalization spoke German and Turkish rather than Arabic, English, French, or Urdu which are the shared languages of the organizational networks typically recruiting Western Europeans.

The GTM became a magnet for the recruitment of radicalized Germans. (In 2009 alone, forty Germans were estimated by the authorities to have left to join the German Taliban branch of the IMU.[59]) The Germans set up its own fighter brigade and their own "village" in Pakistan's mountainous border region to Afghanistan with their German wives and children, who in videos were seen attending a movement school with instruction in German. Jihadist propaganda videos that exploited the blond hair and blue eyes of their children for advertising the attraction of the jihadist "lifestyle" cropped up on YouTube.

Unusually at the time, before the Islamic State's open-door policy let Western women into the movement, women were involved in the activities, too. Luisa Sediqui (Umm Saffiya), for instance, is a German convert who joined the IMU and went to Waziristan with her young daughter and her husband, Djavad. In October 2011 she published an online letter to her "German sisters," encouraging them to join the movement and expressing her desire to become a martyr.[60]

Another female militant, Filiz, the wife of Sauerland cell ringleader Fritz Gelowicz, was tried and sentenced in Berlin in March 2011 together with her co-conspirators who collected money and posted online propaganda

encouraging people to join the IMU and IJU. Only the Dutch networks saw a similar shift to the inclusion of women in operational roles, although for the most part as agitators and recruiters.

The GTM militants targeted NATO convoys and German army soldiers in northern Afghanistan. At that time, Germany had 4,400 *Bundeswehr* soldiers stationed in Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led multilateral force in Afghanistan.

Breininger, who was seen as the mastermind behind the Sauerland plot to bomb the Ramstein airbase in 2007, was killed in May 2010, in Pakistan in armed combat with Pakistani security forces. His successor, Abdul Fettah Almani ("the German"), a 27-year-old German citizen from Berlin, was killed in a drone strike in 2011. A dozen or more German militants were killed in drone strikes in Pakistan between 2010 and 2012.

The use of drone strikes by the American military against the German militants fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan aroused opposition in Germany. A complaint filed by the mother of one of the dead militants a drone strike in northwest Pakistan in October 2010 in which five German citizens were killed challenged the legality of the strike and alleged such targeted killings amounted to war crimes against a German national. The complaint led to a strongly-worded decision from the Germany's Federal Prosecutor General. The decision, published in 2013, upheld the legality of the strikes but pertained only to the specific case and to the ongoing war in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan and the prosecutor signaled strong opposition to the American concept of the "war on terror" as a borderless global conflict.[61] Nevertheless, more Germans were subsequently targeted in drone strikes—including five years later in Syria—without any legal challenge. The controversy over the use of drones had by then abated.

By 2011 and 2012, it seemed that the threat posed by the German-Uzbek network had been dealt with, but, as early as 2010, a new community of radical Salafist preachers and propagandists were making their presence known. Among them was a charismatic Black rap-musician of from Berlin who had had a successful career under the name of Deso Dogg. (His real name was Dennis Cuspert; see Chapter 11.) In 2010, he announced his conversion to Islam and joined a fast-growing group led by a White convert, Pierre Vogel. Cuspert started preaching under the name "Abu Maleeq" and adapted his rap to an oral music format endorsed by the jihadists known as *nasheed*. Vogel's missionary approach attracted a following among radicalized youths and converts. Vogel's organization produced several spinoffs led by

charismatic radical preachers who took to the streets or took over mosques in Berlin, Hamburg, and in Cologne and Frankfurt. Their activities recruited a new, much larger wave of radicalized Germans, many of them converts to Islam. By the end of 2015, close to a thousand German militants are estimated to have traveled to the war zone in Syria and Iraq to join the fight, most of joining the Islamic State.

France

For close to a decade, it looked as though France had avoided attacks by home-based militants. There was, it seemed, no entrenched localized jihadist counterculture comparable to those that gave rise to the British, Belgian, and Dutch extremist networks. But by 2005 recruitment and mobilization in support of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq had changed the picture.

Using network analysis to identify the most connected actors in the French network, we pinpointed five individuals. All belonged to large cells that were dismantled between 2000 and 2005. After that, the militants organized themselves in leaner units and made fewer personal contacts in order to evade detection.

The patriarch of the Benchellali family, Chellali Benchellali, an Algerian who had lived in France for forty years, set up a laboratory in the family apartment in Lyon where he and his sons tried to manufacture a chemical bomb and experimented with ricin. They too experimented with ricin. Benchellali went to Bosnia to fight and set up a makeshift mosque that became known as the Abu Bakr mosque. He, his wife, and two sons were arrested in connected with the bombmaking. A third son was in Afghanistan in 2001 and was transferred to GTMO. Benchellali senior was also involved with another large gang, the "Chechen Network," in a plot to send French youths to fight in Chechnya. The network also planned a chemical attack on the Paris Metro. The French authorities disrupted the cell in 2002. Twenty-five people were convicted in in 2006 in connection with the network. One of the people convicted was Saïd Arif, a former Algerian army officer with a long history of association with Al Qaeda. He has been a designated terrorist by the U.N. Security Council Sanctions Committee (QDi.323). Arif reappears later in the book.

The Nawar family is one of three large French families who could claim at least five members involved in jihadist conspiracies. Nizar Nawar, the

twenty-four-year-old Tunisian resident of France (see above), bombed a synagogue in Djerba, Tunisia, with a truck full of explosives on April 11, 2002, killing nineteen people. Nawar's father, mother, brother, two uncles, and a family friend were subsequently arrested in France and Tunisia. Nizar Nawar was involved with Al Qaeda but maintained contact only with his international handler, the German Christian Ganczarski, and with the ubiquitous mastermind, KSM.

Saïd Arif placed third on our list, probably an undeserved low ranking caused by our inability to access information about his true importance. He had been part of the Algerian contingent in London and a member of both the foiled Strasbourg cell and the Chechen recruitment network, evaded arrest for years. He trained in Chechnya—possibly with al-Zarqawi—and then in Afghanistan with Al Qaeda before the crisis that followed 9/11. Arif acted as an Al Qaeda intermediary for another foreign jihad recruitment cell in Paris's 19th *arrondissement*. He was detained in Syria in 2004 and extradited to stand trial in France. He was released from prison in France in 2011 and placed under house arrest, but fled in 2013 to join the fight in Syria. He died in May 2015 in an airstrike, by an American drone, in Syria.

Fourth on the list followed the 19th *Arrondissement* cell, which was also known as the Buttes-Chaumont group, named after the park in Paris they used for physical training. It was part of a broader network recruiting for Zarqawi's insurgency in Iraq, dubbed the *Filières Irakienne* ("Brothers for Iraq") by the French media. The leader was a twenty-four-year-old man, Farid Benyettou, who set up a radical mosque with himself as the preacher. Members of the group included the young men who in January 2015 carried out the attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* editorial office in Paris and a kosher supermarket. Benyettou was arrested in January 2005 and the network dismantled.[62] After leaving prison in 2015, he finished nursing school and he was working at Pariss *Pitié-Salpêtrière* hospital in November 2015 when the victims from the attacks on restaurants and a concert hall from the ISIS-managed terrorist attack were brought in. Today, he voluntarily works to help prevent young Muslims from becoming radicalized.[63]

Another well-connected French-based militant, Hamid Bach, a French citizen of Moroccan origin, was radicalized at the Finsbury Park Mosque under the instruction of Abu Hamza and Abu Qatada. He was also a veteran of the 19th *Arrondissement* group but moved on and set up a cell in the southern city of Montpelier that recruited from the old GSPC network and sent people to fight for al-Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq. Bach was arrested in France in June 2005 and the recruitment ring dismantled.

Although a significant number of the plots developed in Paris, they took root in different sections of the capital and its suburbs. In the rest of France, militants were widely dispersed, from Lille in the North, to Mulhouse and Besançon in the Northeast, to Lyon and its suburbs in the center of the country, to the Rhône region in the Southeast, and Marseille, Toulouse and Montpelier in the South.

Al Qaeda-affiliated Italian jihadists based in Milan even used an unlikely place such as the resort town of Menton on the French Riviera as a secondary base. Saadi Fadhal, a member of the Italian cell, stayed in Menton for months before going to Iraq and detonating a truck bomb on August 19, 2003, in Baghdad.[64] The target was the hotel where the United Nations had set up local headquarters for the region. Twenty-two people were killed, including Sérgio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations' special envoy, and U.N. staff members from fifteen different countries. Nine were Iraqi staff members at the mission. Hundreds were injured in the blast. One of the grievously injured staff members was Henrik Kolstrup, a Danish friend from our high school days together. The U.N. aid workers were there to assist in the reconstruction of Iraq after the U.S. invasion. In an audio tape released later, Zarqawi described the United Nations as "the protector of the Jews," and listed the countries lost to Muslims at the hands of the United Nations: Palestine, Bosnia, Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Chechnya.[65]

The French networks had become highly decentralized, due in large part to France's successful suppression of some established networks of Algerian militants. Unlike most other European countries, France already had a comprehensive counterterrorist framework in place by the time the second cycle of Al Qaeda mobilization reinvigorated the country's jihadist networks. Remnants of the Algerian networks—the GIA, its successor the GSPC after 1998, and then AQIM after the GSPC's name change and formal alliance with Al Qaeda in 2007—nonetheless continued to act to integrate the French networks.

The Netherlands

After the 9/11 attacks, a local jihadist counterculture sprang up in The Netherlands. The main hub, a network of young men and women based up and down the densely populated commuter corridor between Rotterdam, The Hague, and Amsterdam, was dubbed the "Hofstadgroep" by the Dutch intelligence service. The reference is to the capital city, The Hague, where some of the youths were based. Their most famous coup was the murder in

2004 of the filmmaker, Theo van Gogh, who was killed by Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch-Moroccan youth from Amsterdam.

The Dutch jihadist milieu grew from three independent sources: a few sheikhs and mosques along the commuter belt between Rotterdam and Amsterdam; a cohort of homegrown immigrant-origin youths who quickly escaped from the clerics and mosques to meet on their own terms in apartments and Internet cafes; and an international recruitment ring linked to Al Qaeda through the personal contacts of one man. Lacking leadership and access to training and logistical support in Al Qaeda-sponsored camps, the Hofstad Group is best described as an extremist youth culture. Its members reflected to an unusual degree local Dutch characteristics: inclusive of women and converts, prickly and independent, accepting of racial differences, and Dutch-speaking.

The discovery, in 2002, that two young Dutch Muslims, Ahmed el Bakiouli and Khariq el Hassnoui, had been killed in Kashmir set off a prolonged controversy in Holland over the role played by salafist mosques, and more particularly the role of Saudi financiers. The two boys attended the al-Fourqaan mosque in Eindhoven and a handful of other mosques in Rotterdam, Tilburg, and Amsterdam.[66] The el-Tawheed mosque in Amsterdam was accused of having received funding from the banned al-Haramein charity, but charges were never filed. The imams at the mosques, Fawaz Jneid (The Hague), Eisha Bersham (Eindhoven), and Ahmed Salam (Tilburg), were accused of radicalizing Dutch youths and supporting recruitment to terrorism abroad, but none were charged with terrorist offenses.

Dutch courts refused to allow the expulsion of the imams on the grounds that they had Dutch citizenship or family connections that gave them the right to remain in the country. Only Bersham, who was labeled a threat to national security, was expelled in 2007 and banned from the Netherlands for a period of ten years. The influence of the mosques and the imams was, however, effectively neutralized by a combination of de-radicalization programs and sophisticated policing. Municipal funding schemes for youth club activities and social events promoted integration. Legislative changes and intense public scrutiny forced transparency upon the mosques. There was outrage, for instance, when the Tilburg imam was filmed telling followers not to pay tax.

Dutch authorities targeted the Hofstad Group in three waves of arrests, in the fall of 2003, the fall of 2004, and the fall of 2005. Samir Azzouz, a Dutch-Moroccan who was a leading figure in the group was apprehended, aged seventeen, in the Ukraine in 2003 as he was trying to make his way to

join the fight in Chechnya. He was rearrested ten months later on suspicion of planning to carry out a terrorist attack, but he was released without charge. Another arrest followed in 2004. This time the police discovered in his apartment plans to launch chemical attacks against Amsterdam's Schiphol airport and the Borssele nuclear power plant.[67]

For a while, the radical Dutch youths found a spiritual leader in Redouan al-Issar (aka Sheikh Abu Khaled), who operated out of a phone center in Rotterdam. Al-Issar fled the Netherlands shortly after the killing of van Gogh, and he remains a mysterious figure. He may have been a member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, but it is possible also that he used the identity of someone who had been a member. He is reported to have belonged to *Takfir wal-Hijra*, the extremist group to which Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Qatada also belonged, but that too cannot be confirmed. He is known to have sold drugs and facilitated prostitution while preaching violent jihadism from a phone center in Schiedam, a depressed area of Rotterdam. It was here that the inner group of the Hofstad network met. Azzouz and two other youths, who were both employed at the phone center, were apprehended at the center in 2004 after they had committed armed robbery at a grocery store where Azzouz had once worked. (In 2004, many people went to phone centers to make long-distance calls. You bought a card from the shopkeeper and used it to make international calls.)

Al-Issar encouraged the young men in the Hofstad network to marry as many women as they could, and he conducted informal marriages for members of the group. Islamic marriages are common among orthodox salafists, who reject Western marriage procedures, but the frequency of informal marriages—and polygamous informal marriages—among the very young Hofstad members took on a sinister sect-like character. A 2006 report from the Dutch counterterrorism coordinator described the marriages as a recruitment tool and a means for exercising social control in the network: "Informal Islamic marriages [are used] to win support for their extremist violent Takfir ideology and to recruit women for violent Jihad."[68] The report compared the men's behavior to the "loverboy" tactics sometimes used to recruit women for prostitution.[69]

The young women, unusually at the time, became active participants in the network. They translated jihadist literature, ran websites, and sometimes participated in logistical planning. One woman reportedly acted as "quartermaster" for the group, hiding weapons in her apartment. The women also helped recruit other youths, sometimes bringing their sisters and brothers into the network. The most important of these women was Soumaya Sahla,

who was in an informal Islamic marriage with Nouredine el Fahtni, another Hofstad member. Sahla was charged and convicted on weapons charges. She had used her sister, who worked at a pharmacy near the Dutch parliament building in The Hague, to get the home addresses of parliamentarians whom the group plotted to kill. Sahla was in a polygamous relationship, as el Fahtni was already married to a Dutch teenager, Malika Shabi, who also belonged to the group. Samir Azzouz, the leader of the group, was married to Abida Kabbaj, a young woman who was public spokesperson in the Netherlands for the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, a Palestinian terrorist group.

Three other prominent members of the Hofstad Group, Jason Walters, Mohammed el Morabit, and Zine Labidine Aouraghe were also "married" to women in the group. Al-Issar oversaw the "marriage" of another couple, Hanan Sarrokh and Lahbib Bachar, who later entered a witness protection program after testifying against fellow members.

Further arrests, investigations and trials revealed that the group had plotted to attack the Dutch parliament and the headquarters of the Dutch security agency, the AIVD, and to assassinate Dutch public figures, among them Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders. Thirty members of the Hofstad network were tried in consecutive trials stretching over five years. The gang-like youth culture had few and mostly aspirational contacts to Al Qaeda's central cadre: but the Dutch network had links to militant individuals and groups in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and possibly Italy. Among their contacts was a suspected Al Qaeda coordinator who was linked to the 2003 Casablanca bombings and who was in communication with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.[70]

The Hofstad Group was suppressed after a few years. This was a credit to the clearheaded thinking and effectiveness of Dutch law enforcement and counterterrorism professionals. The Dutch National Counter-Terrorism Coordinator downgraded the risk posed by the network in 2006 and the risk assessment has not been raised since.[71] The assessment noted that Al Qaeda played a negligible role in the Netherlands and that after the incarceration of leaders the radical milieus suffered from a lack of leadership. A group of Dutch analysts suggested in a personal conversation with the author that at its peak the network had between 250 to 300 members. The Dutch intelligence service at one point produced what became known as "the list of 150" named members.[72] After its effective suppression, the Dutch security services estimated that there remained ten to twenty "loose-knit structures that can be qualified as terrorist networks."[73] Concerns about Al

Qaeda-directed terrorism revived in 2006 after Ayman al-Zawahiri designated the Netherlands "a second-rate crusader nation."[74] By 2010, the remaining extremist groups seemed to have been suppressed.

But then, in 2011, the British militant, Anjem Choudary, turned up and introduced his new brand of in-your-face extremism that played well among Dutch and Belgian youths. His affiliate, Sharia4Holland, was initially formed by a handful of barely adult Dutch followers. Between 100 and 200 Dutch volunteers traveled to Syria to join, for the most part, the Islamic State. Many, if not most, traveled through the Sharia4Holland network.

The long shadow of Al Qaeda was observed also in Holland in the form of a man named Murat Öfkeli (alias Abu Jarrah or Ibrahim the Turk). He was born in Turkey in 1970 and became a naturalized Dutch citizen. In 2003 Australian papers revealed that Öfkeli had been involved with jihadist causes while living in Sydney in 2000.

At the time, Öfkeli associated with two men who later became GTMO detainees, David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib, an Egyptian. When Habib was returned to Australia from Guantanamo Bay, the Australian papers published his GTMO file.[75] Information in these files has to be treated with care. Remarkably often, the files contain information that is simply not believable. At other times, however, they do provide valuable information that can be double-checked against other sources. Habib's file listed contacts to key operators in Al Qaeda, *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, and *Gamaat Islamiya*, and includes Habib's testimony that he trained Mohammed Otta and other members of the German 9/11 cell in martial arts during a stay in training camps in Afghanistan.

Evidence that Öfkeli was a major actor continued to accumulate. He used the al-Fourqaan Mosque in Eindhoven as a base for recruitment, and had two personal addresses, one in Eindhoven and another in Rotterdam. He is reported to have shared a home in Rotterdam with an Algerian, Rabah Idoughi, who was arrested in 2001 on charges of forging travel documents for Al Qaeda. Among other housemates in Rotterdam were participants in the 2001 plot to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Paris and possibly also the NATO headquarters in Brussels.

Öfkeli was repeatedly arrested in The Netherlands but never convicted of any crime. In 2001, he and eleven other men were charged with recruiting volunteers to join the violent jihad in Chechnya and Afghanistan. They were acquitted on the grounds that the Netherlands was not at war with Afghanistan. He was arrested again in 2003 together with a group of men

from Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Iraq, all of whom were in the country illegally. During a raid on his apartment, the police found an audio-cassette on which Öfkeli was heard pledging allegiance to the leader of the GSPC, Abu Hamza al-Hattab. It was revealed during the trial that the group had taking scuba-diving lessons and practiced canoeing at a local training camp, apparently in preparation for an attack in Rotterdam harbor, a large international container port. One of the defendants had made a martyrdom testament. Another was revealed to have dealt in cocaine and heroin. The courts found them all not guilty.

Öfkeli was arrested for a third time in 2006, following the arrest of three Dutch youths in Baku, Azerbaijan. He stood trial the following year together with five Dutch youths between seventeen and twenty years old (one of them a woman) on charges of recruiting volunteers to join the armed struggle abroad. Since his last arrest, this had been made a criminal offense. He and his co-defendants were nevertheless acquitted, but, citing international rules regarding members of Al Qaeda and associated organizations, the Dutch authorities froze Öfkeli's bank accounts and those of his co-defendant, Yahya El Mamy Sakho in 2007. Sakho was deported to Mauretania.[76] This is the only public evidence that the Dutch authorities considered the two men to be associated with Al Qaeda. Öfkeli died in 2012 fighting with the Nusra Front, Al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria.

Spain

After the 2004 train bombings in Madrid, the Spanish authorities foiled several serious terrorist conspiracies involving groups with international connections. The all-Algerian members of the so-called Dixan commando who planned a bomb attack against a joint U.S.-Spanish base in northern Spain in the spring 2003 had connections to other militants of Algerian origin in Britain, Germany, and France, including the French Chechen Network, and the Strasbourg Christmas market plotters. However, they had no known contacts with other jihadists in Spain itself, although its leaders had lived in the country for several years.

There was another Moroccan hub in Barcelona, which was the target of at least three waves of arrests in June 2005, January 2006, and May 2007. The Barcelona network specialized in recruiting volunteers to fight for Al Qaeda in Iraq. It also gave logistical support to other European cells. Barcelona militants, for instance, helped smuggle three Madrid bombers, Mohamed

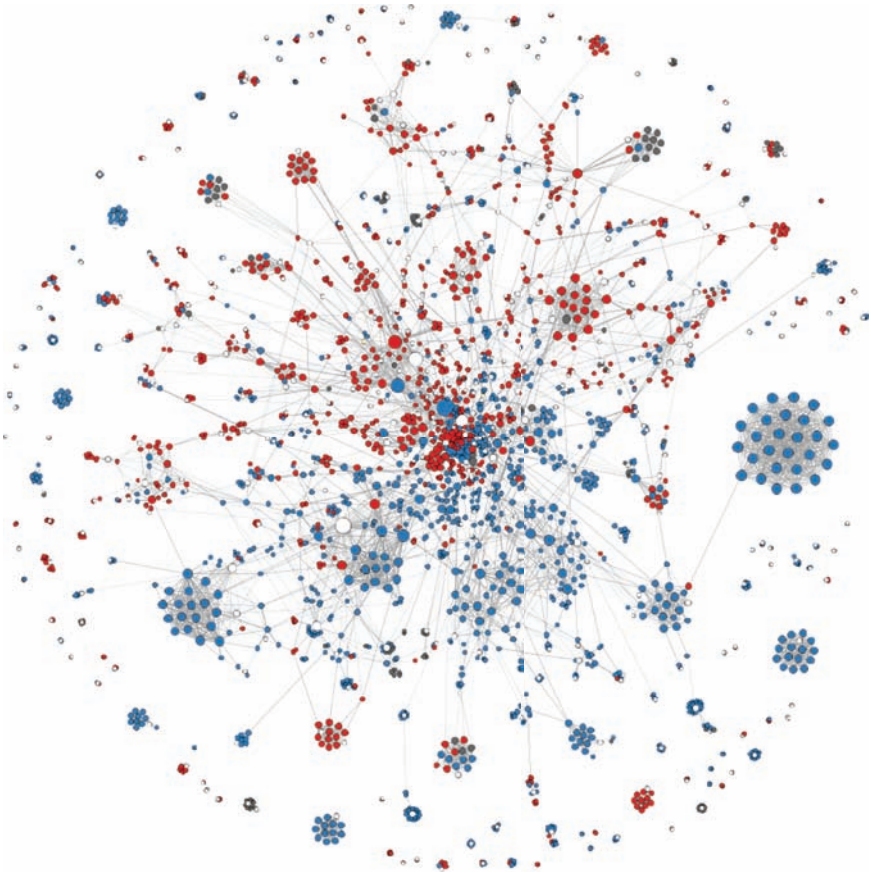
Afalah, Mohammed Belhadj, and Daoud Ouhnane, out of Spain to Belgium. From Belgium, all three men escaped to Syria and Iraq.[77]

In January 2008, fourteen men were arrested and sent for trial, accused of planning suicide bombings in Barcelona's subway and other targets.[78] Twelve were of Pakistani origin and two Indian nationals. They were all legal or illegal immigrants who had moved to Spain. Only one was a naturalized Spanish national. Eleven were convicted. They did not fit the typical description of "homegrown" terrorist. The men were between the ages of twenty-five and sixty-three at the time of their arrest, writes Fernando Reinares, and their average age was thirty-six. Based on testimony given during the trial by a cooperating co-conspirator, Reinares ties the plot directly to Al Qaeda's bases in Waziristan, and the camps in north west Pakistan.[79] Some of the men had met in Italy and from there gone on to a *Lashkar-e-Taiba* camp in Pakistan. A witness described the men as beholden to both *Lashkar* and Al Qaeda. When asked by the prosecutor about which organization the witness himself belonged to, the answer was "Al Qaeda." By 2008, when the men were in Pakistan, *Lashkar* was leasing space in its camps to Al Qaeda.

A new network type

The dramatic growth of jihadist mobilization in Western Europe during the decade following the 9/11 attacks presented Al Qaeda's senior management with new opportunities and also obvious challenges. The trade-off between growth and quality control is a well-known problem in business, and indeed in any organization. In this case, further difficulties were presented by geography and the constraints of maintaining secrecy.

We recorded a total of 2,288 persons with European residence and/or citizenship who "did something" in this decade (see Figure 7.2). The "something" could have been any and all of the following: the person was arrested and convicted in connection with a domestic conspiracy or a conspiracy in another country; traveled abroad to join or attempt to join a foreign terrorist organization or to go to a training camp; or died in pursuit of terrorist acts at home or abroad. We assess that close to 40% of these individuals were homegrown residents or citizens of a European country. (In close to eight percent of the cases we could not determine the person's origin as native or immigrant.)



Native/Immigrant	Key	N	%
Homegrown		912	39.9%
Immigrant		1,195	52.2%
Unknown		179	7.8%
Not Applicable		2	0.09%
Org/Plot			

Figure 7.2. Network graphic of the European Networks, 2002–2011 (both years included).

Notes: N (plots) = 283 conspiracies; N (organizations) = 116; N (people) = 2,288. Connected person nodes: 1,717. Nodes in unconnected dyads and larger cells: 401. True isolates person nodes: 170. Plot and organization nodes are in white. Person nodes are colored by native-born/immigrant origin. True isolates (7.4%) were removed from the graphic.

Edges: Person to person, N = 11,203; Person to plot, N = 1,779; Person to organization, N = 881. Created in Gephi by Rosanne Libretti.

Source: The Western Jihadism Project.

The network was considerably more fragmented and diffuse than the jihadist networks of the 1990s which were depicted in Chapter 5. Of the individual person nodes, 75% were connected to the core network comprising the giant networked component in the center of of the graphic. Of the nearly 25% that we were not able to link up with the main network, most were linked to other individuals in small or large cells comprising a minimum of two people. What are called "true isolates," ran to 7%, meaning that we were unable to link them to anyone else in the network. That does not mean that these individuals were so-called "lone wolves." In fact, we have concluded that hardly any fell into this category. Their lack of links to other nodes in the network was in most cases a function of our strict inclusion criteria with respect to European citizenship or residence in the period. Sometimes, the person acted in concert with one or more individuals who were not charged and convicted, or for whom we had too little information to include in the data collection. A notable fact was that fewer than 10% were identified as converts to Islam (9.7%). In the case of twenty-nine individuals we were unable to establish if the person had converted to Islam or was born into a Muslim family. Anecdotal evidence to the contrary, the first ten years after the 9/11 attacks still included relatively few converts to Islam. Change was underway, but how much the social and demographic picture was changing became apparent only later.

The analysis shows that "homegrown" terrorism was a myth. Jihadist extremism grew in Western Europe in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks as a result of a combination of the recruitment efforts of local preachers who mediated contacts to Al Qaeda's top leaders and to other foreign terrorist organizations in Al Qaeda's orbit, and a peer-based networked organization that facilitated coordinated action.

The next generation

The *At-Tibyan* online forum originated with a group of young people who met in 2004 at the Finsbury Park Mosque at an event that had been billed as a summer camp for youths. The network was an example of dual-track online and offline networking. The networked group was based in four countries and spawned nine different plots involving violent action in seven different countries. (See Textbox 7.1.) All of their violent plots were foiled. The forum was operational from early 2004 until October 2005 when the

key moderators were arrested. All of the forum members were aged under twenty-five at the time of their arrests in 2005.

The core members brought in friends, and in that way the network grew. They wanted to translate their online activities into "real" action. Working together they made the forum the center of a family of websites that specialized in providing access to Arabic-language texts and translations of manuscripts written by prominent Jihadist theoreticians. The forum members also engaged in massive online credit card fraud.

This was still the early days of online networking, and the forum managers permitted casual users to read and browse content but only the administrators were allowed to post content. Direct communications between the administrators and participants occurred through multiple associated email accounts. The online architecture consisted of a main site, at-Tawheed.com, linked to a closed forum, tibyan.blogspot.com. The main site was backed up by two mirror sites and supplemented by sites in other languages, e.g., a French (ribaat.org) and a Danish site (tawhid.dk). The *At-Tibyan* group frequently changed hosting servers but the main site was registered with an American Internet Service provider based in Texas. The domain name was apparently registered in the name of a victim of identity theft.[80] The domains for the mirror sites were registered, at least at some point in time, at Tokelau, a Micronesian atoll, that was giving away free domain names. Blogspot, which housed the interactive part of the *At-Tibyan* website family, was owned by Google.

Banners and other decorations on the main site were in Arabic but the material was in English. Affiliated sites were available in nine languages: Arabic, Bosnian, English, Danish, French, Indonesian, Turkish, Swedish, Urdu, French, and Turkish. A total of nineteen different web sites were linked to the *At-Tibyan* blog, the website, and its mirror sites. (This is a low number of interlinked sites by contemporary standards.) Among these were the sites of the two ideologues, Abu Qatada al-Filistini and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.

The forum managers ("moderators") were Aabid Khan, a youth from Bradford, and Younes Tsouli, the son of a Moroccan diplomat living in London. Two other key associates were Waseem Mughal and Tariq al-Daour. Two Americans, Ehsanul Sadequee and Tarek Mehanna, also had administrator privileges on the site. Mehanna was particularly well connected on the Internet and distributed vast amounts of extremist material via the *At-Tibyan* Forum and other sites. Khan claimed later he had been radicalized at the age

of twelve, watching Jihadist material posted by Azzam Publications and the *Qoqaz* website. These are both long-running Al Qaeda outlets.

Tsouli was known by his online handle *Irhabi007* (Terrorist007) and often referred to himself as "Bond." Most, if not all of the members were former participants in another forum, the United States-based ClearGuidance.[81] Al-Daour was the group's financier. On his computer drives police found 37,000 credit card details, including security codes. The card information had been stolen in phishing attacks or purchased from criminal online forums. (This was before encryption technology produced what is now known as the "dark web.") About 2.5 million Euros had been stolen in fraudulent transactions. Domains were paid for by means of credit card fraud and some of the group's sites were registered using stolen identities.

Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, of Al Qaeda in Iraq, commissioned translations and used the forum for English-language outreach. The publications put up by the *At-Tibyan* collective, fifty lengthy tomes in PDF formats, are still available for direct download at InternetArchive.com, an online repository. Among the publications were Mohammad al-Maqdisi's book, *The Fruits of Jihad*, and articles by Bin Laden. The blog was run as an online forum for long statements and communiqués. Videos were available from the blogspot.com platform and from the sponsored websites.

The youths associated with the *At-Tibyan* online forum were online innovators. Their web designs predated the social media file-sharing and micro-blogging instruments introduced by Twitter and Facebook, which just a few years later revolutionized online agitation and information sharing. They did flirt with ideas about domestic violent actions and wanted to go abroad to join their heroes in jihad but hardly any of their many plans succeeded. A summary description of some of their plots can be found in Textbox 7.1.

In 2004, Tsouli joined two prominent password-protected Jihadi forums, *Muntada al-Ansar al-Islami* (the Islamic Supporters Forum) and *al-Ekhlas* (Sincerity). (Both sites are now defunct.) Because of his online expertise, Tsouli became an important asset to Al Qaeda in Iraq and helped post and spread its content online. The *Muntada al-Ansar* was shut down in May 2004 after Tsouli uploaded a video of the execution of Nick Berg, an American contractor. Musab al-Zarqawi carried out the execution.[82] When they were arrested, Tsouli and Mughal were found to be in possession of a grisly collection of videos showing the decapitations of Berg, Daniel Pearl, and Ken Bigley, a British contractor executed by Zarqawi's group in 2004.

Textbox 7.1. Violent plots deriving from the *At-Tibyan* Forum

Foreign Fighters recruitment plot, Sudbury, MA: Tarek Mehanna, operating out of Sudbury, Massachusetts, recruited a number of other extremists in the area. He and Ahmad Abousamra traveled to the Middle East in 2004 to attend terrorist training camps and then returned home. In late 2003 Mehanna asked al-Daour to finance the Sudbury group's travel plans. After a plan to join AQI failed, Mehanna conspired with others in New England to carry out an attack on a mall using automatic weapons, but the plot never reached the point of action. Mehanna was arrested in October of 2009, and sentenced to seventeen and half years in prison in April of 2012.

The "Schoolboys" Pakistan Trip (Bradford, U.K.): Akbar Butt, Awaab Iqbal, Aitzaz Zafar, Usman Ahmed Malik, and Mohammed Irfan Raja met through Tsouli's *At-Tibyan* Forum. The teenagers planned to travel to Pakistan for terror training and to become foreign fighters. All five were arrested in 2007. An appeals court quashed the initial conviction in 2008 when a judge ruled that there was insufficient evidence to prove that they intended to use the extremist material in their possession.

The Glostrup-Sarajevo Bomb Plot: In October 2005, two of Tsouli's friends, Mirsad Bektašević, a Swedish citizen of Bosnian origin, and Abdulkadir Cesur, a Danish-born Turkish citizen, were arrested in Sarajevo. They were found to be in possession of 20 kg of explosives, a suicide belt, handguns and Jihadist videos. Another youth was on his way to Sarajevo when his father stopped him.

The Glostrup Group: In 2004, a group of twelve young Danish Muslims, all but one teenagers, traveled to London to attend a "summer festival" organized by Omar Bakri Muhammad. It was also attended by Tsouli and possibly other members of the *At-Tibyan* group. Ten days after the Sarajevo arrests, four teenagers from the group were arrested in Copenhagen for plotting to bomb targets in the city and to provide material support for the Sarajevo conspiracy. This led to the arrest of Tsouli in London. One of the Danish youths, Elias Ibn Hsain, who was 18 years old when arrested, was in regular contact with the would-be bombers in Sarajevo and Tsouli.

The Nassari Suicide Plot: Yassin Nassari was arrested at Luton Airport in May of 2006 after returning from the Netherlands. Suspected of planning a suicide attack, he was carrying instructions for how to make a rocket and explosives. He, too, belonged to the *At-Tibyan* forum and

communicated directly with Al-Daour, who sent him instructions on how to fabricate poisons and make a suicide vest. He was convicted and served three and a half years in prison before his release in 2008. His wife, Bouchra el-Hor was also charged in the case because of a letter she had written telling him to become a martyr and promising to follow in his footsteps, or that she would send their baby son on to become a martyr.[83] She was charged but found not guilty of failing to report her husband.

GA Terrorism Support: Syed Haris Ahmed and Ehsanul Islam Sadequee videotaped potential targets in the United States, which they then sent to Younis Tsouli and Aabid Khan via email. The two men traveled to Canada to conspire with the Toronto 18 in 2005 and later went, on separate occasions, to Pakistan and Bangladesh with the aim of obtaining terrorist training. Ahmed was sentenced to thirteen years in prison and Sadequee to seventeen years in December 2009.

The Toronto 18 Plot: The group plotted to attack Canadian infrastructure, national buildings, and other targets. They were also accused of plotting to behead the Canadian Prime Minister. The Toronto group included five minors and six young adults between the ages of nineteen and twenty-three. In March 2006, Khan flew to Toronto to meet with members of the group, including Fahim Ahmed and Zakaria Amara, the ringleaders. All were in close contact online and with the *At-Tibyan* network.

The youths were breathtakingly determined. In 2004, Khan hatched a plan to have the groups that were part of the *At-Tibyan* network launch terrorist attacks in their different localities. Khan's close online partners included Fahim Ahmad, a member of the "Toronto 18" and Ahmad's sister-in-law, Saima Mohamed, and in the United States, Ehsanul Sadequee, from Atlanta, and Sarfaraz Jamal (aka "Sas Jamal") from Houston. Jamal was an Internet entrepreneur. Beginning in 2001, he grabbed twenty or so domain names on the chance that he might use them one day. They came in handy when one of his on-line friends proposed setting up an Internet forum for Muslim youth. ClearGuidance.com started slowly. It had only 172 members in January 2002, but word spread quickly and soon the site had members everywhere, from the suburbs of Detroit to the suburbs of London. At one point, the moderators claimed to have 15,000 followers.[84] Jamal moved to Jordan in 2007 and was never prosecuted.

Khan made four trips to Pakistan in 2002 and 2003, and went again in 2005, seeking contacts that would enable members of his network to obtain terrorist training. He was arrested in June 2006 returning from a trip to the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan. During his trial in London, it became clear that Khan had attempted to purchase bomb-making materials online and had been collecting guns and components for fuses and detonators.

Tsouli and Mirsad Bektašević, a Swedish resident involved with a group of teenagers in Copenhagen, and the Atlanta-based Ehsanul Islam Sadequee, posted a statement in 2005 declaring the creation of "Al Qaeda in Northern Europe" on the *al-Ansar* forum, of which Tsouli had become the administrator two months earlier.[85] The forum was a straight-up Al Qaeda propaganda outfit. Sadequee may have tried to join Bektašević in a planned attack in Europe.

In October 2005, Bektašević was arrested together with Abdelkadir Cesur, a Dane of Turkish origin, in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina. The two men were in possession of a suicide vest and various other materials for carrying out an attack. (Three local men were also arrested and charged with providing the youths with bomb materials.) In the days before the arrest, Bektašević was in phone contact with both Tsouli in London and Sadequee in Bangladesh. Tsouli was arrested in the United Kingdom on October 21, 2005, without ever having left the country, and was charged with conspiring with Bektašević and the Sarajevo bombers.

In Copenhagen, the teenagers whose parents prevented them from traveling to travel to Sarajevo to help their friends, made their own plans. They did not know it, but they had been put under surveillance. Conversations caught on surveillance tapes while they were scouting for targets suggested that they settled on bombing a busy commuter hub in the center of the city. They were arrested in October 2005, a few days after the arrests in Sarajevo. The Copenhagen group went through a lengthy trial that resulted in convictions for three of them. Five years later, and out of prison, they joined a new group that affiliated itself with Anjem Choudary's consortium. Some of the members of the group who had been arrested in 2005 went to Syria to join the Islamic State.

The Atlanta cell, which consisted of just two young men, Syed Haris Ahmed and Ehsanul Islam Sadequee, thought that they were assisting with the development of an attack on their American homeland. In July 2005, a few months after he and his friend Sadequee traveled from Atlanta to

Washington D.C. on a reconnaissance mission, Ahmed flew to Pakistan allegedly hoping to join a terrorist training camp. While in Pakistan, he met with Khan. Sadeeque subsequently flew to Bangladesh carrying Khan's mobile number, maps and other materials that were to be used in planning an attack in the United States.

The Boston area collaborative included Daniel Maldonado (aka Daniel al-Jughaifi) from Methuen, Massachusetts, who was an administrator of the previously mentioned extremist website, ClearGuidance. He also had a blog and a listing on MuslimMatch.com, which he used to search for a second wife. Maldonado left the Boston area for Houston to work for the jihadist Internet entrepreneur, Sarafaz Jamal, who was the developer and proprietor of a jihadist web development business. He moved to Jordan in 2007.[86] Maldonado was friends with Tarek Mehanna and Ahmad Abousamra, who for a period both lived in Sudbury, a wealthy Boston suburb.

The group was hyperactive online but also had other plans. They set up a training group for area youths, who they may have recruited from local mosques, and celebrated the 9/11 attacks. They also decided to go to Pakistan to join Al Qaeda. The young men were turned back and told to do something "at home." They watched and distributed the video clips of the executions of Nick Berg and Daniel Pearl, and allegedly planned similar actions against U.S. officials. Their plans fizzled out when they could not get the necessary weapons. In 2004, Mehanna, along with Abousamra and another friend, flew to Yemen hoping to join Al Qaeda in Iraq.[87] The friend was convinced by his parents to turn around. Mehanna also returned home without success. (The friend is not named because he was never convicted of a terrorism-related crime.) Only Abousamra made it to Yemen but he too quickly returned to Boston. Once back home, Mehanna took on translation work for the *At-Tibyan* Forum. Among other jobs, he worked on the English translation of a video featuring Ayman al-Zawahiri. In December 2006, Maldonado called Mehanna in Boston and tried to persuade him to join him in the "paradise" of the real Islamic state.

The end of the *At-Tibyan* hub came in June 2006 when their British coordinator, Aabid Khan, was arrested at Heathrow Airport returning from Pakistan. Khan was found to have traces of explosive materials on his hands when he was arrested, and his luggage contained instructional manuals on how to fabricate bombs. Another member of the *At-Tibyan* group, Mohammed Atif Siddique, a twenty-year-old, had been arrested in Glasgow a few months earlier, on his way to meet with Khan in Pakistan.[88]

The Boston hub unraveled shortly afterwards. Maldonado was arrested in January 2007 in Kenya after he fled from Somalia. He was sent home to the United States and sentenced to ten years in prison in July 2007. Mehanna was arrested in 2008 as he attempted to go to Saudi Arabia. Their friend Omar Hammami moved to Toronto in 2004, where he married a Somali-Canadian woman with whom he traveled to Egypt in 2005. Hammami then abandoned her and their child, to join the al-Shabaab in Somalia. After several failed efforts to join Al Qaeda in Pakistan and in Yemen, Abousamra moved to Syria in 2006. His whereabouts were not publicly known until he emerged as the chief editor of *Dabiq* and then became production manager for *Rumiyah*, the slick online magazine that served as the official mouthpiece for the Islamic State. He was killed in an air strike in January 2017.[89] (Their stories continue in Chapter 9.)

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8

Theory and Practice of the Armed Struggle

Jihadism is a highly complex ideology. The core dogmas have remained relatively stable over the decades. Policy and tactics have changed, but the global movement derives cohesion from a backbone of highly structured commandments. Chief among these is the "individual obligation" to engage in the armed *jihad* to defend "Muslim lands." This was the rousing call to "join the caravan" that Abdullah Azzam made the title of his manifesto, published in 1987. Western volunteers will cite the "obligation" when you ask them why they want to travel abroad to fight. How that works in practice was a topic I was lucky to be able to discuss with a veteran Danish foreign fighter who I met in Copenhagen, Slimane Hajj Abderrahmane.

Slimane had been returned to Danish custody from detention in Guantanamo Bay as a result of intervention by the Danish government. He died a few years after our conversation, in February 2013, one of two Danes who were among the first Westerners to be killed fighting for *Jabhat al-Nusra*, the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria. This chapter tells the story of how he ended up in American military custody in Afghanistan in 2002, and explains the doctrines that motivated him to die for the *jihad*. But before I come to the interview, the ideas that induce men like Slimane to become a "holy warrior," as they see themselves, are sketched out.

The "individual duty"

Jihadist ideology selects some doctrines from the classical Islamic theological tradition and, step-by-step, reassembles them to build a revolutionary political ideology that is disguised as religious doctrine. It started with Abdullah Azzam (1941–1989), the "father of global" *jihad*, who developed

the doctrine of "the individual obligation" in the 1980s to get Muslims to volunteer for his cause in Afghanistan. Azzam embodied the jihadist ideal of a warrior who is also a scholar and public intellectual. He spoke, he wrote, and he carried a gun. His charisma is apparent on grainy videos from his lectures and from photos that continue to circulate online. Readers who wish to know more about Azzam, the man who was Bin Laden mentor, his collaborator and co-founder of Al Qaeda, may turn to Thomas Hegghammer's outstanding book, *The Caravan* (2020).[1]

Azzam delivered his argument on lecture tours and, at great length, in his books, including *Defense of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation after Faith* (1979) and *Join the Caravan* (1987), which were distributed in bookstores, on mail-order compact discs, and offered for download online. Another tract, *The Lofty Mountain*, which glorified the disastrous battle of "the Lion's Den," helping to cement the myth of Bin Laden. The date of publication is unclear but it probably coincided with the founding of Al Qaeda in Bin Laden's house in Peshawar, Pakistan. On the lecture circuit, he ridiculed, cajoled, and invoked the language of blood and soil: "Those who believe that Islam can flourish [and] be victorious without Jihaad, fighting, and blood indeed are illusioned [*sic*] and do not understand the nature of this religion. The prestige of preachers, the influence of Islam, the dignity of Muslims, cannot be attained without Jihaad."[2]

Azzam banged the drum for war, not for self-improvement. *Jihad*, he insisted, is about "expelling the *Kuffar* from our land, and it is *Fard Ayn*, a compulsory duty upon all. It is the most important of all the compulsory duties . . . "[3] This too was a stretch. Traditionally, the individual duties (*fard al-ayn*) are those that are required of every Muslim, such as daily prayers, giving to charity, observing dietary rules, fasting, and, if able, to make pilgrimage (*hajj*) at least once in an individual's life time. Making self-deployment to fight in armed *jihad*—in Afghanistan at first but in theory anywhere—an individual religious obligation was, surely, rather a different matter.

Azzam rewrote classical canonical law on *jihad* as defensive warfare to mobilize Muslims everywhere for war against the Soviet invaders and the secular regime in Afghanistan. The new army wasn't called up by a Muslim ruler to defend their land but by the moral obligation to fight against the infidel communists occupying Muslim land in Afghanistan. That was the here and now, but the subtext in Azzam's writings and lectures always was that the war continues.

He could arouse men to the cause, make them feel guilty, even angry about the injustice done to fellow Muslim brethren in Afghanistan and pay up. But why should they go to fight in a distant war for Afghans whose habits and practices were nothing like their own? Wealthy Arab businessmen in California or Muslim immigrants and converts to Islam in Europe, or Algerian university students had very little in common with the Pashtun tribal leaders and warlords in Afghanistan and their ragtag armies of *mujahideen* fighters. Shaming his listeners and readers, Azzam describe the armed struggle as the "forgotten" obligation. Joining the armed fight was not just a moral duty, it was an individual obligation and a matter of faith. If you don't do it, you are not a Muslim, was the message. Appealing to the common identity as Muslims overrode class and ethnicity, and invoked a romantic picture of unity and greatness lost.

Nelly Lahoud perceptively points out that a virtual consensus existed between medieval Christian and Muslim "just war" theorists about the inalienable right to defensive warfare.[4] When the enemy invades, God is with you when you fight back. Today, we call for a vote in the United Nations. But that is exactly what the problem is, according to the jihadists. The United Nations is an extension of the crusades set up to defy God's sovereignty. Muslim governments have abdicated their obligation to defend the Muslim nation to secular institutions in the service of the "crusader nations."

Bin Laden and Zawahiri appropriated the dogma that *jihad* is "an individual obligation" and turned it into a "compulsory" obligation. They globalized the fight and made attacking the United States, and its allies in Europe and Israel, and regimes in the Muslim world in cahoots with the infidel, a logical extension of the injunction to defend "Muslim lands."

Azzam's rhetoric runs like a red thread through Bin Laden's *fatwā* from 1996. Bin Laden invoked Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328), a Sunni Muslim scholar who in his time was a purist and an instigator of rebellion, which makes him a favorite with today's jihadists, to command Muslims anywhere to disavow their governments and join the revolution. In 1303, Ibn Taymiyyah declared religious war against the Mongol rulers. The Americans were today's Mongol Empire. Therefore, historic precedence applies—and all Muslims have a non-negotiable obligation existed to stand and fight the Americans. Bin Laden wrote:

> Clearly after Belief (*Imaan*) there is no more important duty than pushing the American enemy out of the holy land. No other priority, except Belief, could be considered before it; the people of knowledge, Ibn Taymiyyah, stated:

> "Fighting in self-defense is the strongest way of warding off harm to honor and religion, and it is a collective duty. Warding off an enemy who corrupts religion and the world is a top duty after faith. It is unconditional and is done according to means."[5]

But do not wait to be called up. Heroes should not wait on a ruling by the religious authorities. "There are no preconditions," he wrote. When Islam is attacked the normal rules of respect for authority do not apply. Fifteen years later, in the fall 2011 issue of *Inspire*, the English-language online magazine, Anwar al-Awlaki updated but also echoed Bin Laden's injunction. "Don't wait for permission," Awlaki preached, "do something." (And don't tell the parents.)

The jihadists set themselves apart from other insurgent groups or revolutionary movements by calling for global jihad. In the topsy-turvy world of the jihadist belief system, the Muslim nation—the global *ummah*—is under attack everywhere by the Crusader nations, and it is being betrayed by Muslim "tyrants." Therefore, the armed *jihad*—defensive warfare—is obligatory for anyone, anywhere.

Jihadism is a revanchist ideology. It is built on the claim that Muslims have suffered loss of blood and soil. Only war can bring back stolen land and restore the trans-national nation of Islam. The original injury that the jihadists wish to undo occurred in the eleventh and twelfth centuries during the Christian crusades, when European Kings and Princelings financed expeditions to take back the "Holy Land" from Muslim rulers and in the process engaged in territorial plunder and conquest on a grand scale in the Mediterranean region. The jihadists regard themselves as "counter-crusaders" reversing and redeeming those ancient Muslim losses.

Colonization, the slicing up of the Arab heartland into sovereign (and often warring) states after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, and, finally, the creation of Israel, are all injuries that followed from the medieval crusades.

David Cook describes jihadism as, in essence, a conspiracy theory. The outside world is conspiring to crush Islam and annihilate all Muslims.[6] As the most powerful state, the United States leads the modern "crusader-Zionist alliance" against Islam and against Al Qaeda, the standard-bearer of the Muslim counter-crusade. The story of loss and defeat goes back all the way back to the seventh century, when the world of Islam split between Sunni and Shia Islam over the line of descent from the Prophet during the Rashidun Caliphate (632–661).

It is not enough to call up the troops. You also have to point them in the right direction. In Afghanistan and in Bosnia, identifying the enemy was simple. Turning the militants around and getting them to sign up for a global terrorism campaign against the "far enemy" requires a sophisticated spin and some twisted logic. That's what the jihadists have the theorists of the armed *jihad*.

Bin Laden subscribed to an updated version of the "Domino Theory," the idea popular in the 1950s among some American policymakers that if you let one country "go Communist" the rest would fall like dominos. In Bin Laden's version, the United States would withdraw from the fight when the costs got too high, just as Soviet Union did in Afghanistan. The Europeans will follow suit, leaving the Muslim "tyrants" and Israel for the taking by the coming global alliance of jihadist emirates.

Bin Laden believed that Al Qaeda had been responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Union by defeating it in Afghanistan. He trusted that the *mujahideen*, the revolutionary cadre of religious guerilla forces, could defeat the United States in a similar war of attrition. The United States might be bigger and stronger than the former Soviet Union, but it lacked resolve. Bin Laden never let go of his theory that the United States would collapse from its internal weakness as a result of the jihadists' efforts. He often used a curious expression that he took from Mao Zedong—the United States was in his words, a "paper tiger," a weak regime dressed up in military hardware that is useless when facing willing martyrs (see Textbox 8.1.).

The focus on attacking the "far enemy," the United States, unified the branches of the jihadist movement and reframed the fight not only as a religious war but also, at the same time, as an anti-imperialist campaign for Muslim self-determination. But since the 9/11 attacks it proved difficult to attack the United States in its heartland. The jihadists had to find softer targets. First in line were commuter trains in Europe packed with civilians, among them many Muslims. But was this not a step too far, even a perversion of *jihad*?

Life as a jihadist

I talked with Slimane Hadj Abderrahmane in Copenhagen on April 2, 2007. I had asked for the meeting though a mutual acquaintance, Hans Jørgen Bonnichsen, the head of operations in the Danish national security agency.[7] Bonnichsen had personally traveled to Cuba in 2004 on a military plane made available by the Danish government to pick Slimane up on the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base and bring him back to Denmark. Back home,

Textbox 8.1. The United States as a "Paper Tiger"

"Paper tiger" is a Chinese expression for a state that pretends to be powerful but whose bark is worse than its bite. The use of this expression to depict the United States as an apparently terrifying but in reality, ineffectual superpower can be traced back to Mao Zedong (1893–1976), the Communist leader of the Chinese revolution. He used the phrase in 1956 about the United States. "In appearance it is very powerful but in reality it is nothing to be afraid of," he wrote, "it is a paper tiger [. . .] unable to withstand the wind and the rain. I believe that it is nothing but a paper tiger."[8] Bin Laden used the epithet in an interview given in 1998 to the ABC correspondent John Miller. He also told Miller that the United States cannot handle death. The oft-used slogan "We love death as you love life" alludes to the jihadists' veneration of death as a pathway to martyrdom and hidden source of strength. Bin Laden boasted:

> After our victory in Afghanistan and the defeat of the oppressors who had killed millions of Muslims, the legend about the invincibility of the superpowers vanished. Our boys no longer viewed America as a superpower. So, when they left Afghanistan, they went to Somalia and prepared themselves carefully for a long war. They had thought that the Americans were like the Russians, so they trained and prepared. They were stunned when they discovered how low was the morale of the American soldier. America had entered with 30,000 soldiers in addition to thousands of soldiers from different countries in the world. . . . As I said, our boys were shocked by the low morale of the American soldier and they realized that the American soldier was just a paper tiger. He was unable to endure the strikes that were dealt to his army, so he fled, [. . .].[9]

This characterization of the United States as a "paper tiger"—and as "weak," "defeated," "cowardly," lacking in "will," etc.—is a recurrent meme in jihadist narratives.

Bonnichsen had kept in touch with Slimane. He did not sit in on my meeting with Slimane.

We spoke in Danish. I took notes, but no tape recorder was used. The interview took place in an office provided by a friend who then was the editor-in-chief of *Politiken*, a Danish daily newspaper.[10] In the interview, I wanted to know how and why Slimane became a jihadist, and what he

thought the rules of engagement for armed *jihad* were. We talked for hours, fueled by coffee.

Slimane was born in 1973 in Roskilde, a provincial town just outside Copenhagen. His mother was Danish and his father Algerian, which made him a Danish citizen by birth. When he was eight, the family moved to Algeria. By the time I met Slimane, he had been involved, for twenty-five years, in an on-and-off sort of way, in what he called "the struggle."[11]

He was first drawn into the Islamist movement by the GIA (see especially Chapter 5). In 1992, when the Algerian civil war broke out, he left the country—part of a general exodus of GIA militants. He went first to France and then moved back to Denmark, perhaps after a detour through London. (When speaking to me, he was obviously being deliberately vague about his exact movements.) In the 1990s, he linked up with a cell of extremist Algerians in Aarhus, Denmark's second-largest city, which happens to be my hometown. Following in the slipstream of extremist migrations in those years, he arrived at an Al Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan in August 2001, just before the 9/11 attacks. When the United States invaded Afghanistan, he was among the fighters evacuating Afghanistan but was captured and detained in a U.S. detention center in Kandahar. In February 2002, he was transferred to the military prison on the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base (GTMO), the only Danish citizen among the 779 detainees that eventually filled the detention camp.

After two years and a few weeks in GTMO, Slimane was brought back to Denmark by the Danish government. But really it was Bonnichsen who brought him back. Slimane was one of the first detainees to be released.

As a precondition for his release from Guantanamo, Slimane was made to sign a promise that he would not commit acts of terrorism again, and Danish officials promised not to lose sight of him. Slimane faced no charges upon his return to Denmark. Before the 9/11 attacks, joining Al Qaeda was not yet a crime in Denmark, and Danish legal experts argued that the agreement made by Danish authorities with the U.S. authorities was not legally binding, and could not be enforced.[12] Slimane's passport was held by the police (but not canceled), and he was released into the care of social services, with orders to stay away from computers and the internet.

When we spoke, he was free to wander about Copenhagen. In Denmark, he became a minor celebrity. He boasted on Danish TV that he would "soon" return to the battlefield and spoke about his desire to make *shahid*, to become a martyr.[13]

Few people believed him but Slimane's days in the service of the armed struggle were not yet over.

The everyday life of a jihadist can be surprisingly mundane. He married and had children. Taking the kids to school, going to the supermarket for diapers, seeing the in-laws, and checking in with the probation officer—all the while scheming to join the action again. That was Slimane's daily routine when we met, although I did not know about the scheming.

Who to kill—and how to kill

The London Underground attacks on July 7 and July 21, 2005, were a backdrop for our conversation. 52 people died in the first attack, not counting the four suicide bombers, and over 700 injured. At least five of the casualties were Muslims. In a video released by Al Qaeda two months after the bombings, one of the bombers, Mohammad Sidique Khan, explained the symbolism of their deaths: "Our words are dead until we give them life with our blood." Khan closed out his statement by describing his act of self-sacrifice as *dua*, an act of supplication, to Allah, and asked Allah to "accept the work from me and my brothers" and allow them to enter paradise as martyrs.[14] The bombings brought suicide terrorism and the so-called "homegrown" terrorists, Western citizens who attack their own country in the name of global terrorism, to widespread attention in a way that the 9/11 attacks had not done.

The bombings were widely regarded as "un-Islamic" by British Muslims. Sajda Mughal, a British Muslim woman, who was a passenger on one of the trains, later went on to form a non-profit organization to combat extremism. She spoke for many people when she described her feelings: "I couldn't accept that they had done this because I know that in the Koran it says that killing an innocent person is like killing humanity."[15] But a significant minority of British Muslims refused to condemn suicide operations.[16] Public opinion surveys taken in the aftermath of the Underground bombings caused uproar when they reported that some 12%, perhaps as many as 20%, of British Muslims expressed support for the bombers. An arguably more reliable survey found that 6% of British Muslims were in some measure supportive of Islamist extremism and the bombings.[17]

I enquired if Slimane thought the use of suicide bombers was acceptable: after all, the Koran forbids suicide (*sura* 2:195 and 4:29) and the prohibition is reinforced by several *hadiths* (the reported sayings of Muhammad) that are clear on the impermissibility of suicide. One *hadith* equates suicide with

murder and stipulates eternal condemnation to hellfire as the punishment (Book 83, *Hadith* 31). Another says that the person who commits suicide is punished eternally by a forced repetition of the act of suicide (Koran 23:118).

Quoting scripture, I asked whether he condoned what the London bombers had done. Would he have done it?

Slimane said he did not personally condone suicide missions—but dying for the cause was good. The London bombers were "Brothers," but he would not have done it himself.

I pressed him further: leaving aside the question of what the Koran says about suicide, was it not a sin to kill innocents: women, children, and Muslims? Many other victims of the London Underground bombings probably opposed the war in Iraq.

Slimane agreed that I was right on the theory. A distinction must be made, he said, between combatants and non-combatants; and yet were the passengers on the London trains really innocent? Did they not support their government, even if they opposed what the West did to Muslims? "There are those who would say that they were accessories to the actions of the Blair government simply by virtue of not having made *hijra*," the migration to live under the *sharia* that jihadists consider to be a non-negotiable obligation. Muslims who do not take action against them are guilty of supporting the infidels. Do they not pay taxes to the government that supported Bush's invasion of Iraq? It could be said that the Muslims who were killed were also legitimate targets, for the same reasons, he reasoned.

Slimane was giving me a lesson in a loyalty test known as the *Al-wala' wa-l-bara'* doctrine, which in English is translated as "loyalty and disavowal." (Literally, *Al-wala* means friendship and respect; *wa-l-bara* means to despise or to fight against.) The concept may be interpreted as an obligation to love all other Muslims, and equally to hate their enemies; or more commonly to hold the faith in your heart and disavow sin and all that is forbidden by Islam.

The "loyalty and disavowal" doctrine plays in big role in both Wahhabism and in Salafi-jihadism. According to some fundamentalist interpretations, it implies that righteous Muslims cannot be friends with nor tolerate unbelievers It is also used to justify aggressive missionary tactics. The injunction to love/hate for God is not found in the Koran.[18] Contingent on the translation, the contested verse in the Koran (verse 60:1) contains an injunction not to take God's enemies as allies or as friends, but to offer them affection (Christians would say compassion). Another part of the verse

(verse 60:40) tells the believers to ask for forgiveness for the sinners and infidels who have not embraced God and also to disassociate themselves from people who do not follow God's path. The strongest formulation of this doctrine is attributed to Abraham, a patriarch prophet in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam alike: "We have denied you, and there has appeared between us and you animosity and hatred forever until you believe in Allah alone."[19]

The "loyalty and disavowal" doctrine is weaponized by the jihadists when they tie it to the injunction to wage war on the non-believers. It legitimizes the killing of the infidels and of fellow Muslims who are reclassified as infidels because of their un-Islamic practices. It is, in essence, a free pass given to the jihadists to kill anyone who is not with them. Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Mohammed 'Aasim al-Maqdisi, both venerated extremist scholars, have written lengthy essays on the proper interpretation of the doctrine. Al-Maqdisi argues that neglecting the obligation to hate the enemies of Islam is tantamount to denial of what it means to be Muslim and is a violation of the *shahada*.[20]

The jihadist public intellectuals

When religious law and terrorist tactics clash, it falls to the public intellectuals of jihadism to square the circle. Few have done a better job of translating doctrine into memes in English than Anwar al-Awlaki, the American-born preacher from an upper-class Yemini family. (I neglected to ask Slimane if he had listened to Awlaki's lectures. If he did, he would be violating the rules of his supervised release, so it was not a question that I would have expected him to answer.)

Awlaki preached at two of the mosques that were attended by the 9/11 hijackers during their months in the United States—in San Diego and in Falls Church, a suburb of Washington DC. He moved to the United Kingdom in 2002 to escape the FBI, which was taking an interest in his activities. Over a period of about eighteen months, Awlaki preached all over the United Kingdom. Tapes of his lectures circulated widely. In 2004, he moved back to Yemen where he was arrested and held in prison between 2006 and 2007.

What Slimane told me fitted in with Awlaki's explanation of the doctrine of *Al-wala' wa-l-bara'*:

> In the current modern age, we find the Muslims in a pit of darkness. The Muslims of today have adopted the ways of the enemy. They forbid the good and enjoin the forbidden. They imitate the disbelievers and choose them as their friends and trustees. They mock believers who oppose the ways of the disbelievers and hypocrites. They help to deviate people from the Path of Allah and His Messenger (*sallallahu alaiyhi wa sallam*). They have left *jihad* for the pleasures and pursuits of the material world. They have abandoned *Shariah* [religious law] and adopted *Jahiliyyah* [willful ignorance]. These people have strayed from the Straight Path and they have turned away from *al wala wal bara*, and as a result, have fallen into the trap of *Shaytaan* [Satan].[21]

The basic argument is that Muslims everywhere are under an obligation to rise up to defend Islam. Those who fail in this duty are therefore enemies of Islam.

As Slimane explained things, the Brothers who blew themselves up in London had to decide for themselves what was right. He acknowledged there was a problem with authority in Islam. The right course of action was uncertain as long as there was not a proper caliph to lay down the law. The ideology does lay down basic rules, but, as Slimane put it, it "tells the jihadists what the rules are so they can make the right decisions on their own." (He consistently spoke about ideology rather than religion, because he considered referring to Islam as a "religion" to be politically incorrect. Referring to "religions" would imply that there are faiths other than Islam.) The answer to my questions about the legality of using suicide bombers and killing Muslims, in matters that are not clearly settled by the *sharia*, was simple. The Brothers should decide. "We must discuss among ourselves what to do," Slimane said, explaining that, "You cannot call al Qaeda, and ask if we should bomb the United Nations' headquarters."

But didn't Al Qaeda take responsibility for the attacks, I asked?

Slimane thought that the London bombings were probably the work of "free-lancers." As for the suicide tapes released after the bombings, they proved nothing. He thought it likely that friends of the London bombers had passed them to Ayman al-Zawahiri, who then added a message taking credit. In fact, Al Qaeda did direct the London Underground bombings. Rashid Rauf, a British citizen of Pakistani origin, was one of several pivotal figures in a clandestine network of agents who managed the London attacks, as well as other attacks in Western Europe in those years.[22] Computer files seized during the raid on Bin Laden's Abbottabad compound in 2011 showed that Bin Laden himself had a hand in directing the London bombings.[23]

Slimane was wrong about the facts. It was curious that he would discount Al Qaeda's role but I was interested in his thinking rather than arguing with him about what really happened.

Fighting the good fight

Slimane's view that the Brothers should decide what to do raised a tricky question. If the Brothers decided, why had there not been more attacks in Europe? Do the European recruits lack the courage? It turned out that Slimane did not have high regards for the "homegrown" Brothers. Rolling his eyes mockingly and making a thumbs-up gesture imitating somebody high on dope, he said "they sit there with their joints saying 'Usama Bin Laden is cool.'" Catching himself, Slimane backtracked and acknowledged that supporting Bin Laden was a "good start," but he declared that the European volunteers did not have "the steel." Thumbing his chest to show that he had what was required, he gestured as he spoke: "Next time, I will put a grenade inside my shirt and run towards the enemy. As Muslims, we are not allowed to take our own lives but we aim to be heroes in battle. I am not afraid . . . Dying fighting is a good thing . . . I wanted to kill myself fighting but in Pakistan, we were told to put down our weapons, so I did not have the chance."

Cracks were opening in Slimane's story, so I had some questions. What weapons? What was he told in Pakistan, and by whom? He had told me earlier that he never got to hold a gun in Afghanistan, and that the guesthouse he was staying at in Jalalabad when he first arrived was a Koran school. And what was that "next time" that he was thinking of? Slimane was always hazy on the details of his engagements in Afghanistan but he may have inadvertently confirmed some of the details recorded in the docket from his intake interrogation at Guantanamo Bay. According to the summary provided by his GTMO interrogators, Slimane presented himself in August 2001 in Afghanistan to Jaffar al-Jazeeri (aka Omar Chaabani), an Algerian camp manager who worked closely with Abu Doha, Bin Laden's agent, in London and ran a guest house exclusively for Algerians. He was told, however, that the training camps were closed until October.[24] In all probability Al Qaeda closed them in anticipation of U.S. missile attacks strikes following the big operation that was coming in the United States. (It was widely known among the Al Qaeda elite that

something "big" was going to happen.) Slimane was then sent to the guesthouse in Jalalabad where he says he received religious education. According to the GTMO detainee information summary, he was also given light weapons training. Slimane was staying at the guesthouse when he learned of the 9/11 attacks. He was then given the choice to stay and fight or to leave. Slimane told the interrogators that he chose to leave and traveled with a group into the mountains forming the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan: so his comment about having been told to put down arms in Pakistan makes sense. He was part of Al Qaeda's flight in December 2001 from Afghanistan to the tribal areas in Pakistan.[25] He was subsequently arrested in Kohat, in the Pakistani frontier region adjoining Afghanistan.

As for Slimane's remark about "next time," six months after we met he was convicted of theft and sentenced to ten months in prison for stealing passports and credit cards at a mail sorting center where he worked. He had withdrawn $20,000 on a card, not bothering to hide his face from the CCTV cameras at the ATMs when he took out the money. He refused to cooperate with his defense lawyer during the trial, and he never said where he was going or who was going to use the stolen passports. He kept a low profile after he was released in 2008, but he clearly stayed in touch with the extremist circles in Copenhagen. Somehow, in late 2012, he was able to travel to Syria and rejoin the armed struggle. According to social media reports, he died fighting in Syria for *Jabhat al-Nusra*, an Al Qaeda affiliate, in February 2013.

The when and where of the armed *jihad*

The jihadists' call for the global armed *jihad* hinges on a claim that the *ummah* is under attack, and they are the only righteous defenders of Islam. That takes care of the *why*, and the *who*. The *where* is trickier. It seemed to many people, including some Western governments, that there were lots of good reasons to fight the communists in Afghanistan. Blowing up trains in Spain and London with civilians and Muslims on board was less easy to justify.

Things may look different if you agree that the territory of the *ummah* includes any region where Islam has ever held sway. Much of Spain, East Africa, the Caucasus, and even China are then to be considered "Muslim lands." In this narration of history, the rules of engagement are wide and

flexible. There remained the problem of the Muslim militants killing Muslim civilians on those trains, something that is clearly forbidden. It was clear to me that Slimane could bend the rules to justify any action that the Brothers decided it was correct to take.

Pivoting on the *Al-wala' wa-l-bara'* rule, the jihadists revise established Islamic doctrines about just warfare that prohibit the killing of non-combatants. Anyone—Muslim or not—who is not with them is reclassified as an enemy of Islam. Over and over, the jihadists kill people who they pretend they are bound to defend. I wanted to know from Slimane who, in his view, gets to decide who is a proper Muslim and who is not? And when are civilians really combatants in a war against Islam? If anybody is theoretically eligible for status as an enemy, on how many fronts should the jihadists fight simultaneously?

Looking for a glimmer of pragmatism, I asked Slimane if it were not sometimes necessary for the holy warriors to form alliances with other groups. I intended the question to lead to a discussion of concessions that, in theory, might lead to a demobilization of Al Qaeda's troops. Political scientists argue that the terrorists can be neutralized through negotiations and some compromise. Give them a piece of land that's theirs and they will stop using terrorism, the argument goes.[26] The problem with that advice is that the jihadists have no negotiable demands; they want control of, as they say, all "Muslim lands."

Slimane agreed that alliances were possible but only if the alliance furthered the jihadists' goals. His reasoning was as follows. The Prophet Muhammad collaborated with unbelievers. Therefore, Muslims (meaning the jihadists) may form alliances with Christians and Jews, but they can never allow unbelievers to assume authority or agree to joint command of the holy warriors. And while you may form coalitions with unbelievers, it is forbidden to work with apostates, meaning "former" Muslims. In principle, as apostates, Shia Muslims are the first enemy.[27] Therefore, as a rule, Slimane observed, "Shiites you can kill anytime." But the jihadis are allowed to use the infidels and apostates for their own purposes; for example, you can purchase weapons from them, he explained.

This argument was not a surprise. Slimane had traveled through Iran to Afghanistan, so he must have known that there was some collaboration between Iran and Al Qaeda. His view that doctrinal latitude permitted working with Shiites resonated with concessions made at the top of the organization to which he had dedicated his life. (In other words, by way of

example, Bin Laden's efforts to get nuclear material from the Iranians was a religiously "correct" tactical step even though the Iranians are Shia.)

But enemies were enemies, and the enemy list came with a rank order. The governments of Islamic countries that collaborate with the infidels are among the highest category of enemies, he explained. Allowing infidels to take control of Muslim lands is a major sin. The Saudi Arabian government practices God's Law partially—a plus in their favor—but has surrendered sovereignty to the Americans. They are therefore apostates. Slimane reminded me that this was the reason for Osama's conflict with the Saudi royal family. After the apostates, come the occupiers: Israel and the United States.

This ordering was a little odd to my mind. In 1998, Bin Laden had redirected the jihadists to "the far enemy," the United States and the West. Slimane, however, still believed that the "near enemy," the Muslim regimes and their irreligious rulers, were the first enemy.

The "Methodology"

I wanted to get into the weeds when it came to the application of the doctrine of "loyalty and disavowal." "Methodology" (manhāj) refers to the proper way to wage *jihad,* the armed struggle. It is essentially the jihadists' way of conceptualizing tactics. The proper methodology of waging war is scripted by interpretation of scripture and "the greats" (cue in Ibn Taymiyyah, the thirteenth-century philosopher revered by the jihadists). But beyond that it must be done "in the path of God." This leaves the intellectuals plenty of room to discuss what is the correct (and the incorrect) way of fighting the struggle.

A few months before we met, Ayman al-Zawahiri had condemned Hamas for "walking into an American trap" by agreeing to participate in elections to the Palestinian National Authority.[28] Relations between the jihadists and the Muslim Brotherhood have historically been fraught, but branding Hamas, the Gaza-based Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood organization, as an enemy force would radically heighten tensions.

I pressed Slimane on the logic of declaring the Muslim Brotherhood an enemy. Was it right to wage war on other Islamists, and what did he think of al-Zawahiri's statement? I wanted to hear his views, but also to check up on his ability to keep up with news. Al-Zawahiri's statement had been

subjected to much discussion online in the jihadist forums but had also received much coverage in the mainstream media. Slimane was banned from the internet. I wondered if he nonetheless had access to the latest twists and turns of jihadist debates.

It turned out Slimane knew all about al-Zawahiri's statement. It was clear from his answers that he was reading the forums on the internet, where jihadist discussed the latest updates. (The jihadists' perceived need to declare open war on Hamas abated when the efforts to form a single Palestinian government for Gaza and the West Bank collapsed three months later.) Slimane explained that the "primary problem" for the jihadists was not Israel. It was Hamas' consent to participation in elections. The principle was clear to him and he did not query the party line on this: democracy means allowing man-made law to supplant God's Law. Engaging in elections and representative government would be polytheism and is not allowed. Hamas had acquiesced in democracy and thereby departed from the righteous path. They were turning away from God's Law. Those who do not govern according to the Koran are infidels.

As for the Palestinians, Slimane had other complaints. Worse even than consenting to elections, the Palestinian Authority had requested help from the United Nations. Hamas was "practically begging the West for money," he said, with contempt. "I would rather die from hunger, and have my family die too," rather than allow U.N. agencies to operate on Muslim territory. Inviting non-Muslims onto Muslim territory is "forbidden." Slimane was apparently unaware that the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) has been feeding Palestinians in Gaza for thirty years.

I did not correct him on the history of U.N. assistance to the Palestinians, but tried the personal angle. His wife was expecting a baby. Perhaps his view would change when he had children?

Perhaps, Slimane answered, and yet he made clear he did not believe that he would change his mind.

Responding to my question about fighting on too many fronts, Slimane conceded that I was "correct." Warring on multiple fronts could weaken the jihadists. On the other hand, he said, "the more fleas the dog has, the more he has to scratch himself." Puzzled, I asked for clarification.

What he meant, he said, was that one more enemy for the holy warriors would be like a drop in the water. "All the governments in the Islamic countries fight against Islam, so they are all enemies from the start." But

getting to the correct (that word again) answer to my question would take a long time. Only those who know how to interpret the Koran in the light of the proper *hadith* can deduce the answer, he said. (*Hadith* [Arabic, plu. *ahadith*] is a collection of accounts of the actions or sayings of Muhammad. The *hadith* is not a divine revelation. It comprises reports by the Prophet's contemporaries of his words, actions, and silent signs of consent or disapproval. *Hadiths* are oral histories written down after Muhammad's death in 632.) Evaluating *sayings* by pedigree and reliability was a science. It was the task of scholars, he explained. However, Slimane was confident that he himself knew which *hadiths* to trust and what methods of reasoning to follow, and so he was able to arrive at the "correct answer."

There then followed a lengthy discussion of how to distinguish between Muslims who merely make mistakes and those who are *bona fide* apostates. The logic to be mastered by the good jihadist was becoming clearer.

Is the *sharia* like natural law, like gravity, for example, I asked?

Slimane was happy with my comparison. "Islam is a science and the *sharia* is basic law," he explained. As in biology and physics, once you have learned the basics you can start to engage with the logic. But basic law can never be ignored. "You have to stay inside the rules that stipulate how you interpret Allah's revelations. If you do not follow the rules, the result will be wrong. I have learned the rules, and therefore I can find the mistakes."

Slimane's sister and brother-in-law were not so smart, he considered. They wanted to discuss this or that "nonsense" that they had picked up on TV from al-Qaradawi. They likely had access to a cable channel broadcasting the famous Sheik Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Egyptian Islamist preacher who has a huge following in Europe and the Middle East. He was based in Qatar for decades from where he ran Islam Online, an internet and satellite TV empire.

They "plead for their sick auntie," Slimane said, using a Danish expression that describes grasping at straws. "[Islam] would all be meaningless, if left to accidents of interpretation."

In Slimane's world, al-Qaradawi the veteran religious scholar is considered an "innovator," a bad thing that means that he departs from the approved classics when he interprets Islamic religious law in the context of temporary practical life. In 2006, al-Qaradawi supported Hamas' participation in legislative elections to the joint Palestinian National Authority. He also strongly encouraged European Muslims to be active in democratic politics in the West. In 2011, he even condoned the election of Muslim women to national

legislative bodies, something the jihadists considered a double sin: accepting elections and accepting women as public figures. (Al-Qaradawi moved back to his native Egypt in 2011 during the brief interregnum of the Muslim Brotherhood in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.)

At this point, I brought up Tariq Ramadan, a prolific writer who at that time held a chair at Oxford University in Islamic Studies. Ramadan, the grandson of one of the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood, has said that Muslims have a duty to participate in the democratic process. (Ramadan's reputation has since gone downhill. In January 2018, the French police took him into custody and charged him with rape. Two years later, two further counts of rape were added to the charges.[29] In fall 2020, Ramadan faced additional charges of rape. He was held in prison for ten months in France while facing trial but was released to face charges in Switzerland.

Ramadan's star has faded but for a period his writings were influential among Muslim activists wishing to find a new political ethics in Islam.

I wanted to know if Slimane regarded both Ramadan and al-Qaradawi as apostates, since they encouraged Muslims to vote and to stand for election. If so, should they be put on the kill list? Slimane responded that al-Qaradawi and Ramadan both engage in "interpretation" of the *sharia*, which is forbidden. He had not read any of Ramadan's books. He did not need to read them, he asserted, because he already knew what they said. Ramadan was telling tales to make Islam palatable to Westerners. He acted as a "double agent" or a Trojan horse for the West within Islam. Curiously, Slimane used the same terms of abuse directed against Ramadan by conservatives, who think he is a double agent for Islamic fundamentalism.[30] But, in Slimane's opinion, these two towering figures in contemporary Islamism were merely guilty of not knowing better. This jihadist, at least, was not ready to sign their death warrants.

Slimane's arrogance made me wonder if he had ever read anything, or had learned anything that would provide a counterweight to the off-the-shelf opinions he expressed to me. For example, had he read the works of Sayyid Qutb? Qutb is widely regarded as a progenitor of extremist Islamism, but reading his work would be indication of some opening to philosophy. It turned out that Slimane did not consider Qutb "a proper scholar." He was on Slimane's list of authorities whose works he already knew but since he already knew everything he did not wish to read further. (Qubt's *opus* runs to thousands of pages.)

Edmund Burke, J.S. Mill, Friedrich Nietzsche, or Karl Marx, all of whom were standard fare when I went through the same gymnasium reading lists Slimane presumably would have had to read. Had he read them? I asked.

Those were taught in school but had he not read their texts. Only books in Arabic about the *fiqh* and discussions of the authenticity of various approved *hadith* commanded his attention. Those he would read.

Prohibited from engaging in "interpretation," the jihadists have one tool for dealing with textual inconsistencies. The parts of the Koranic tradition they do not like are declared "inauthentic." It is therefore crucially important for the acolytes to keep up with what's in and what's out in the jihadist canon. For this, they usually turn to the internet.

Having once again run into the wall of dogma, I returned to practical issues related to voting and representation. Given that the true Islamic State is not coming to Europe any time soon, I asked, may Muslims use democratic instruments to improve the lot of Muslims? Are Muslims not allowed to serve Islam by engaging in public life when living as a minority among non-Muslims?

The rules were clear, Slimane insisted. Muslims are forbidden to participate in parliamentary elections. If you can help carry out the law in ways that improve life for Muslims, however, that is permitted. Muslims may therefore participate in local elections and lobby the government for improvements. Local councils do not really *make* law. They only apply laws promulgated by the national government. And so, according to Slimane, it might be permissible to work with them.

Abdul Wahid Pedersen, a Copenhagen imam, who had stood for election in parliamentary election, had said that if elected he would abstain from participating in decisions that contravened religious law. But this position was flawed, according to Slimane, because no Muslim may be a member of a democratic government. Muslims must always choose Allah's way and the *sharia*. They cannot go along with another ideology. Democratic governance is prohibited for Muslims because elected lawmakers substitute their law for the Law of God. (In the event, Imam Pedersen was not elected. It should be emphasized that his concerns about participating in secular law-making are not shared by Denmark's many elected Muslim parliamentarians and city councilors.)

But I wondered how well-educated Slimane really was. I asked him where in the Koran could the prohibition be found against Muslims engaging in electoral self-government.

Slimane confessed he could not remember the exact verse but directed me to Chapter 9 in the Koran, "about five pages in," where it says that that the infidels allow their priests and rabbis to substitute their own law-making for God's Law. Only the Saudi Arabian translation would provide me with the authentic meaning, so that was the one I had to consult.

This highly controversial chapter provides direction on how to show mercy and justice to polytheist and the enemy.

It was curious that Slimane, who bragged he had memorized half of the Koran in Guantanamo and prided himself on knowing the difference between authentic and inauthentic *hadiths*, could not cite the verse *verbatim*. I went to a print version of the Saudi translation of the Koran and found that he was probably referring to Verse 9:31, which commands the believer to accept that Allah is the one true God. This verse is the basis for what is known as the Doctrine of Unity, the Oneness of God, which forbids Muslims from worshiping other gods. Controversially, it may be taken to mean that participating or recognizing secular law amounts to polytheism.

There are fifty or more English translations of the Koran, including one from 2007 that the translators describe as the "only non-sexist and non-sectarian translation."[31] That wouldn't be the version Slimane wanted me to read. Translations may vary in tone but the verse unequivocally condemns Jews and Christians for elevating "their rabbis and monks to be their lords beside Allah," and for making things "lawful or unlawful according to their own desires without being ordered by Allah."[32] Another translation of the critically important phrase adds a condemnation of obedience to secular law-making and false worship of secular idols: "They take their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allah."

If the Koran is treated as the literal word of God, it matters greatly which translation is consulted.

The problem Slimane faced but could not acknowledge is that no one can say for sure which translation is the most accurate. The irony that he preferred the version authorized by the hated Saudi regime was lost on him.

He never spoke about "faith," only about "ideology" when we discussed Islam. He also never challenged my decision to treat our discussion of jihadist exegesis as a political strategy session; he seemed rather to enjoy it. As he put it during our conversions, there are "rules" for what the jihadists can do and being "correct" about them is the most important thing. It reminded me eerily of the jargon of Marxist debates in the 1970s, when loyalty to the text—preferably written in German—settled arguments.

Paraphrasing Slimane, the purpose of doctrine is to chart the "correct" path forward but, in practice, the jihadists care little about doctrinal consistency. He held suicide bombings to be contrary to religious law but still declared the London Underground suicide attackers to be "Brothers," whose actions were praiseworthy, and who quite rightly worked things out for themselves. His broadmindedness about the "correct" way of *jihad*—despite his constant repetition of the importance of "correctness"—suggested a degree of flexibility and loyalty to the cause on the part of the "good soldiers" that is not easily upset by quarreling among the movement's public intellectuals or the shifting shoals of the jihadists' fortunes.

"Democracy is forbidden"

Ideology is a leadership tool. Bin Laden struck the big themes in the two manifestos he issued in 1996 and 1998; his religious rulings, the jihadists call them. The jihadist intelligentsia has filled in the gaps and expanded the doctrines of *jihad* to make it a theory of everything. The interlocking pieces that form the belief system tell a story about what binds the believers together, why they are right and everybody else is wrong. Non-believers are vilified and dehumanized. The believers meanwhile are endowed with a special purpose in life and an honored role in a world-historical project. God is on their side—even history is theirs.

Ideology functions as a coordinating script for action and as a buffer against setbacks. Failures and setbacks become victories when they are framed as steps towards the inevitable triumph. But that does not mean the jihadists speak with one voice. On the contrary, the jihadist intelligentsia fights over what is to be done, who to kill, how to kill, what the stages are that lead to judgment day. They denounce each other—and then, next thing you know, they have reconciled.

Abhorrence of democracy and elections is central to modern jihadist ideology. Abu Muhammad 'Aasim al-Maqdisi, is the author of a much-translated pamphlet evocatively titled "*Democracy: A Religion!*" The subtitle, "*Democracy is Forbidden*," gives away the plot. The tract against democracy is part of a large body of work published by al-Maqdisi on the principles of *jihad*.[33] Al-Maqdisi's real name is Essam Muhammad Tahir al-Barqawi: his alias means "the Jerusalemite" and refers to his origin as a Palestinian from what is today the West Bank.[34] He now lives in Jordan and is a Jordanian citizen.

Al-Maqdisi is very famous in the small world of Salafi-jihadism. He was a prison cellmate of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the founder and leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, and is alleged to have been al-Zarqawi's mentor in jihadist theory.[35] He is also a friend of Abu Qatada al-Filistini, another famous jihadist philosopher discussed previously in this book.

"Democracy" in this discourse refers to any type of legislative governance. Step-by-step, the argument is as follows: (1) Legislatures make laws in democracies; (2) Only Allah can make laws. (3) Therefore, democracy takes God's place. It follows (4) that democracy is a "religion," contradictory to the religion of Allah, and therefore it is a "false religion" and is "forbidden" to Muslims. Worse, (5) many Muslims have fallen for this false religion and support its implementation. And for the final mortal cut, (6) these Muslims—or people who claim they are Muslim—have crossed over to the other side and become apostates. Al-Maqdisi writes:

> The only laws allowed are Allah's laws. In democracies, people elect representatives who make laws. This means that "man-made" law replaces divine law, which violates the principle of the sovereignty of God's law.

But it is not only democracy that is a "false faith." Every alternative political belief system is contrary to the Oneness rule:

> So every religious community within the disbelieving communities that agreed with, met with, or gathered to a system that contradicts Islam, that has become their religion. This may include Communism, Socialism, Secularism, and other such innovated methods, and principles, which men invented with their own minds, and then satisfied these ideas to be their own religions.

As for Muslims who want elections and democracy, al-Maqdisi considers them devil-worshippers destined for Hell, and apostates. Indeed, Muslims who step away from the true faith are worse sinners than non-Muslims:

> They know that democracy is a religion different from the True monotheistic religion of Islam, and they know it is one of the misguided ways, and that *Shaytan* [Satan] stands at every door of these ways, calling to the Hellfire.
> [...]
> This means that the person who believes and practices Democracy as the ideal way of life, whereby Muslims, Christians, Jews, Secularists, Atheists, etc., can be democratically elected to rule a Muslim country, that person is undoubtedly a *Kafir* (an apostate).

"Democracy" is written with a capital D because it is a religion that substitutes "man-made" laws for divine law. Governments, representatives, and voters who consent to these practices are usurping to themselves what rightly belongs only to Allah. Therefore, they practice a false faith, polytheism, which is *taghoot* and punishable by death in this life and by hellfire in the afterlife. Al-Maqdisi makes no distinction between autocratic regimes where voting is rare and the multi-party electoral system of Western democracies. Muslims who support and participate in un-Islamic political practices are to be regarded as apostates.

Interpreting jihadist announcements is remarkably akin to the lost art of Kremlinologists reading *Pravda*, the state organ of the Soviet Union. You have to read between the lines, relating the doctrine not so much to eternal principles as to the tactical adjustments required by some immediate political developments. The references to the sins of electoral participation, socialism, and communism, make sense in the context of the late 1980s. (Al-Maqdisi's tract against democracy was probably written in 1989 or 1990.[36] The Soviet Union had not yet fallen. Socialism was still seen in many corners of the Arab opposition as an alternative to autocratic regimes in the Middle East, and opponents of the regimes regimes thought that they could be challenged by democratic methods).

The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood chose in 1989 to stand in Jordan's first parliamentary elections and won thirty out of eighty seats. The Brotherhood was accused by jihadist hardliners of letting down the revolution. It had agreed to "the apostate democratic game" by opting to seek reforms through elections and participating in representative institutions. The Brotherhood is often first in line for criticism and the target of criticism even if not explicitly mentioned. (A term often used in veiled references to the Brotherhood is *murjia*, a pejorative term for "appeasers.") The jihadists have a separation problem of Freudian proportions vis-a-vis the Brotherhood, from which they descend.

Slimane had clearly gotten the message about disdaining the Brotherhood and its aspiration to use "the march through the institutions" to gain Islamist reforms.

Becoming a jihadist

Slimane's story contradicted the common narrative that Western Muslims become radicals because they suffer discrimination and so are alienated

from society. After the July 2005 attacks in London, an American writer, Robert Leiken captured the sentiments of many U.S. officials in an article published in *Foreign Affairs* in 2005 under the title "Europe's Angry Muslims."[37] Leiken married the criticisms of European welfare states made by American conservatives to a theory of Muslim alienation. Extremism was put down to Europe's failure to embrace American-style religious pluralism. If Europe would only allow Muslims to practice their faith, as the United States does, the homegrown generation would not embrace the angry Islamist extremism preached by Al Qaeda. Eliminate religious discrimination, and the problem would go away. The argument lost its appeal when arrests of American homegrown jihadists spiked a few years later.

A left-leaning version of the alienation arguments focuses on social exclusion and invokes the usual socio-economic causes of delinquency and rebellion. Olivier Roy, a professor at The European University Institute in Florence, has for years argued that the jihadists are revolutionaries in a thoroughly Westernized mold. In 2008, Roy told an interviewer that Western jihadists, people like Slimane, are perfectly westernized and that their extremism is a variant on a familiar European problem with angry young men who feel excluded:

> In fact, young terrorists don't become terrorists because they went to the mosque and read the Koran. They go for action. They are the real heirs of the ultra-left of the 1970s: obsessed by America and the Wall Street, they are anti-imperialist - more so than supporters of *sharia*. Look at the video-filmed staging of the beheading of the hostages in Iraq: it reproduces the killing of Aldo Moro by the Red brigades in Italy, and it has nothing to do with traditional Muslim imagery.[38]

Further, argued Roy, extremist religion is itself the result of globalization.[39] In this new world, Muslims have entered a global marketplace of competing faiths. Social change associated with global migration has caused Islam to lose the brakes of tradition and community.

I was curious about Slimane's view of the alienation argument. How did he interpret his own personal development, and the motivations that drove him to commit himself to the armed *jihad*? Was he rootless and marginalized? Had he become an extremist because of discrimination and barriers to integration?

It is difficult to argue that "the system" did Slimane wrong. He was treated very well by the Danish welfare state, gaining access to free higher education after being fast-tracked in high school. And the Danish government

went out its way to extract him from the detention in Guantanamo Bay and he was given another chance, with a job, a new identity, and support for his family.

Slimane was well informed about the academic debates around why people like him become violent extremists. The alienation theory was nonsense, he said. Outwardly, the facts supported his view. His cultural competency was fine. He spoke Danish well and clearly loved his mother. "A typical Danish hippie" was how he described her, with no apparent resentment. He told me he grew up "under the picture of Che Guevara," but this description probably says more about the style of decoration typical of Danish homes in the 1970s than about the political atmosphere of his childhood home. Posters of the Cuban Marxist revolutionary were as common in many youthful homes as were pictures of The Doors, the rock band whose star, Jim Morrison, sported wild locks and looked a lot like the Cuban revolutionary hero.

When Slimane was eight, the family moved to Algiers. His mother did not adapt to living in Algeria and moved back to Denmark after a year and a half, leaving Slimane and his two younger sisters with their father's family. (I imagine she had little choice but to leave the children behind with their father.) The trauma of separation must have been significant for mother and children, but Slimane would not accept my sympathy. It was unusual to come from a divorced family in Algiers when he grew up, he said, but "I was always someone who likes to do it alone." If there had been hardship, he was not going to admit to it.

Slimane left Algeria in 1992. By his own account he bummed around Europe's capital cities for a year before he returned to live with his mother. He was about twenty years old at the time. He had forgotten how to speak Danish, so social services enrolled him in intensive Danish language training course and placed him in an adult high school. (In Denmark, all immigrants are given language instruction and provided with an individualized plan intended to promote their integration.)

He just wasn't that interested in school. The curriculum was "easy." Slimane bragged that he never needed to study. Once the teachers had explained a math or a physics problem on the board, he would instantly know it all. In other classes, he would just say what "everyone else were saying" and make the teachers happy, but he scorned the principle of rewarding students who speak up in class. His high school classmates have said that he objected to the teaching of Darwinism; a "forbidden" topic according to Salafists who believe in the divine creation.

After high school, Slimane enrolled to study math at the University of Aarhus. He also hung out with his friends in Aarhus—a town I know well from my own student days—and made a name for himself as a producer and disc jockey of heavy-metal music. At that too he was, by his own account, brilliant. But, music is *haram*, forbidden for Muslims, and he gave it up. He denied smoking hash and engaging in the drinking that is a feature of Danish youth culture. "Even then, I told my friends that one day I would give everything up to fight for the *sharia*," he said, portraying his student years as an interlude of self-indulgence, a gap year. In any case, becoming a math teacher was not one of his life goals.

He dropped out of university because he was bored, hinting that he was "too smart for the system." He had told other interviewers the same story he told me about his brilliant days at university, but he wasn't quite as brilliant as he wanted everyone to think. Two Danish journalists checked his university records and found his grades to be middling, a B average.[40]

What I particularly wanted to know was how and when Slimane had dedicated himself to die for Allah. The story line got fuzzy again. He claimed he knew already as a twelve-year-old that he would "live in a state that observed God's Law." One day, he said, when he was participating in street fighting in Algiers, during a wave of demonstrations and riots, the knowledge came to him. He became politically engaged during the bloody transition struggle following the collapse of Algeria's proto-socialist one-party state. A new constitution in 1989 provided for elections and the legalization of political parties. When the Islamic Salvation Army (FIS) won over 50% of the votes in the 1990 local elections and proceeded to win the initial round in parliamentary elections in December 1991, the military seized power and canceled the result of the election. FIS was banned, and the country descended into civil war. However, when the riots broke out he must have been nineteen and not twelve, as he told me.

Why he represented himself as being younger when the revelation struck is unclear. He may have wanted to present himself as an ideal child, whose awakening followed the ultra-Salafist doctrine that boys are held responsible for religious and legal obligations when they reach puberty. The Islamic State's exploitation of children as "Lion Cub" child soldiers garnered much attention Al Qaeda is not known to have condoned the practice.[41] Perhaps Slimane was simply out to embellish his record as a prodigy.

A more conventional explanation for Slimane's youthful rebelliousness may be found in his family circumstances. The situation of his family in

Algiers could not have been easy. As the eldest son, his place in the hierarchy of the father's extended Algerian family should have been secure, but the divorce and his absent mother would have been a problem, for the Algerian family and for Slimane himself. He was a restless and undoubtedly intelligent teenager who did not fit in with his father's second family at home, and he found status and another family in the revolutionary movement. As for becoming a jihadi, it is all about ideology, he told me. Referring to his revelation, he explained that the difficult part was to embrace the obligation to act righteously. "After that, Allah guides you and gives you will," he said.

When Muslims do the wrong thing

Slimane was not pushed out of school. He jumped. After two years of university studies, and without a diploma, he dropped out to work full-time for the *jihad*. In 1999, he said, he was galvanized by pictures he saw online of murdered Muslims in Kosovo. Through "some Albanians" in Aarhus, he got involved "in putting some trucks together" for Kosovo that summer.

The timing of his mobilization puzzled me. Slimane had hung out in Aarhus during an even greater atrocity committed against Muslims: the Bosnian War between 1992 and 1995. In 1995, over 8,000 Bosnian Muslims were killed in Srebrenica by Serbian paramilitary under the command of Ratko Mladić. Why did he not act then? Was he too busy with his studies and heavy-metal music?

He denied that was the reason. Rather, he explained, the Bosnian Muslims did not deserve help. They should have seen "where things were going", and they "were at fault for not defending themselves" in a timely matter. By trusting the U.N. to protect them, Bosnian Muslims had reneged on a religious duty to defend themselves. Therefore, they did not deserve the assistance of the *mujahideen*.

Slimane's position on the Bosnian genocide is impossible to understand, except through the prism of dogma. The jihadist catechism on the rules of combat in *Dar-al-Islam* and *Dar-al-Kufr*, the House of Islam vs. the House of the Infidel, justified Slimane's otherwise incomprehensible position. By that logic, the mass killings suffered by Muslims in Bosnia were their "own fault" because they took help from Western aid organizations and governments. In contrast, in Kosovo, Albanian Islamist separatists were the aggressors. They

were also in the minority. Therefore, the Holy Warriors—acting as representatives of the *Ummah*—were required to come to their aid. The unavoidable conclusion is that Slimane was moved to mobilize by doctrine rather than by the suffering of Muslims and humanitarian principles.

In the event, the war in Kosovo ended before the warriors from Aarhus were ready to come to their aid. By his own account, Slimane then "packed his bags" and went looking for people who could help him contact the *mujahideen* in Chechnya who were fighting the Russians. From a mosque in Aarhus he was directed to contacts in London, who got him to Afghanistan, and put him in touch with the right people.

Did Slimane really want to go to Chechnya or was that a cover story for getting to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, to join Al Qaeda? It is difficult to know what the truth was. At that time there was no law in Denmark against joining Al Qaeda—so long as you did not do anything criminal on behalf of Al Qaeda. Nevertheless, going off to Afghanistan was not something to broadcast widely.

After Slimane was returned to Denmark from GTMO, a video production made in April 2000—a few months before Slimane traveled to Afghanistan—by two students from the local Art Academy came to light. It featured an interview with Slimane, in which he spoke at length about his support for the Chechens.[42] He said that he had always fancied fighting with a gun in his hands, and going to Chechnya was certain to provide him with the opportunity. Whatever it was that he really wanted, Slimane ended up heading to Afghanistan.

Slimane's mentor in Aarhus was Athmane Mehiri, an Algerian radical Islamist. Mehiri was a member of FIS and then later probably moved on to support the GIA and then the GSPC. Officially, the GSPC affiliated itself with Al Qaeda only in 2003, but Bin Laden had started to invest in the group through his London connections in the late 1990s. Mehiri obtained refugee status in Denmark in 1995 because of the risk of persecution in Algeria that was posed by his membership of FIS.

In 2001, Mehiri was convicted on charges related to an armed bank robbery in Copenhagen that took place in June of that year. Shots were fired and a policeman was injured. This level of violence was very unusual in Denmark at the time. One of the three Algerians who committed the robbery was arrested immediately and the two others fled—by train, no less—to Aarhus to stay in an apartment belonging to another Algerian, Abu Rasheed. In 2004, they were all convicted and expelled from Denmark after

serving their sentences. Mehiri was found guilty of planning the robbery and providing the weapons used. In fact, he had recruited the three French Algerians for the robbery. His apartment was bugged by the Danish police, which easily decoded the four men's primitive code language about a "wedding" and "oranges."

At least two of the men had previous convictions related to terrorism and armed robbery in France. They readily admitted that their intention was to raise money for jihadist insurgents in Algeria.[43] (One of the men was a regular criminal who was brought in for his expertise.) By admitting to political motivation they hoped to avoid expatriation to Algeria. The robbery occurred before legislative changes to the criminal code made supporting a terrorist organization an aggravating factor. Abu Rasheed was later found to be an associate of Al Qaeda's representative in Madrid, Imad Eddin Barakat Yarkas.

Slimane was called as a witness in the trial and testified to the men's political objectives. The court proceedings revealed that he had acted as a courier for Mehiri, traveling to Algeria on three occasions, twice in 2000 and once in 2001. On the last trip, Slimane was arrested by the Algerian police and charged with being a member of the GSPC. Because he held a Danish passport, he was sent back to Denmark.

When in Aarhus, the men met at the Grimhøjvej Mosque, which has a reputation for extremism going back to the 1990s. The mosque is still there, in a suburb that is home to 10,000 people living in concrete public housing high-rises built in the early 1970s. The mosque took a leading part in provoking protests against the Muhammad cartoons published in *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005.[44] After testifying in the trial against the men involved in the robbery in Copenhagen, Slimane went to London. He would not say, but it was highly probable that this is where he made the contacts that enabled him to move on to Afghanistan. He would not name his contacts or reveal where they were located. A good guess is that he went to the Finsbury Park Mosque. In 2007, when I spoke with him, he was still in touch with Mehiri, who was by that time out of Danish prison and living with his family in Algiers after being pardoned under an amnesty agreement.

Slimane may have been better connected than I originally realized. After the release in 2011 by WikiLeaks of the secret GTMO detainee files, I was able to study his file.[45] According to American officials, he had been arrested by the Pakistani military and handed over to the U.S. military in late December 2001. Slimane himself told me that he was captured by American

troops in Pakistan, who were lying in wait for Al Qaeda fighters exiting Afghanistan in the aftermath the battle of Tora Bora. At other times, he has said villagers captured him and his companions.

His file is dated May 23, 2003, and lists his name incorrectly as "Suliman." It says, "The detainee [Slimane] traveled from the United Kingdom to Afghanistan in August 2001 with the intent to join the *Jihad*." Slimane was assessed to be "of intelligence value to the United States" and "a high threat to the U.S., its interests, or its allies." The file identifies him as a member of FIS and of the GSPC. His work as a courier for "Mahiri Uthman" (also misspelled)—"transporting money and equipment and false documents" is mentioned, as is his arrest in Algeria in early 2001. The GTMO interrogators further concluded that the "detainee was involved with the highest leadership of the GSPC while conducting his courier duties." Slimane always denied he was a member of any organization. He was a "sympathizer" but not a member, he said. Membership in a jihadist organization implies pledging allegiance and obedience to a commander, *bayat*. Pledging allegiance to anyone did not seem in character for Slimane.

Reading the report, I had trouble connecting the description with life in the housing development back in Aarhus that I knew so well. Had the "highest leadership" of the extremely violent Algerian jihadists really found sanctuary there? The picture painted in the files seemed like a paranoid's fantasy. And yet, this is indeed how the jihadists build their "netwar" organization. The scope of Slimane's travels across Europe, Africa, and Asia on clandestine errands was astounding and yet typical of the globetrotting recruits from Western Europe and North America.

The unusual part was that on several occasions the Danish authorities had offered Slimane a chance to "deactivate." The first time was in 1993, when he returned to Denmark after the insurrection in Algeria was suppressed, and was allowed to go to high school and then on to university to study math. The second time was in early 2001, when he was arrested in Algeria while working as a money courier for the GSPC, and returned to Denmark. The third time was after the Danish authorities bailed him out of Guantanamo Bay. He had yet one more opportunity to rethink after he was sent to prison for stealing passports and credit cards while working in his government-sponsored job as a postman. At any one of these times, he could have chosen to stay in Denmark. He could even have continued to talk about the armed *jihad* as much as he wanted, as long as he did not do "anything." He did not take these opportunities, which underscores the

intractable problems facing governments trying to reintegrate jihadists when they return home after engaging with foreign terrorist organizations or after they are released from prison. Slimane was unusual in one way, however. He never participated in an attack plot on Danish territory.

When the revolution comes

Before we parted I wanted to know if Slimane was disappointed that he did not get to do what he wanted. For the first time during our long interview Slimane got angry. "What do you mean?" he shot back, suddenly prickly. "I am not someone who shakes hands and agrees to go back and wait for my orders." He had misunderstood my question, but it was interesting that he regarded himself as an independent holy warrior who did not take orders the way some jihadists do. I explained I wanted to know if he was disappointed not to have become a martyr. "It was Allah's will," he stated. Serving time at GTMO earned him some credit with Allah, he figured. The people still imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay are the lucky ones, he thought: they are raking in credit with Allah.

Slimane was proud that he "did not take orders" but clearly, he did. When he was called up again, in 2012, to go to Syria, he went to war.

Where would he prefer to live, in Algeria or another Muslim country, or Denmark, I had asked? In Denmark, Slimane answered, without hesitation. In Algeria he would be put in prison again. "Here, I can practice Islam better than I can in Algeria. But I will not accept things as they are." Jihadists are obligated to seek to live under the *sharia* and therefore must either migrate—choose *hijra*—or work for the revolution. If Slimane could not go back to Algeria, his Islamic homeland, his only option was to be a revolutionary in Denmark.

I wanted to hear what would happen if by a miracle the revolutionaries were successful. Muslims comprise only 3% of the Danish population and very few local Muslims want the Islamist dystopia for which Slimane was fighting. All in all, the prospects for a jihadist revolution in Denmark were surely not good, I challenged him. "If Allah wants," he answered, and shrugged. The Islamic scholars would work out how to combine the caliphate with new technologies, like the internet, and take better care of nature, he said. I asked what would happen to people like Bonnichsen, the head of the Danish security service, who had helped Slimane get out of Guantanamo,

because he believed in Danish legal principles. Slimane's answer was chilling. When the *sharia* came to Denmark, having served as a policeman for the unbelievers, Bonnichsen would be punished. But, I asked, appealing to higher conceptions of justice, had Bonnichsen not proved to be a thoroughly moral and decent man in his dealings with Slimane? "If I one day have the chance," Slimane said, deadly serious, "I would like to give back to him some of what he did for me and intercede on his behalf." Slimane fancied himself a man of influence when the Islamic State arrived in Denmark.

Denmark is a small country. The culture rubs off on everybody, and even the committed revolutionary has to see mum. When we ended the interview I asked, as I always do, if there was anything he wanted to ask me. Slimane had one question. Why was I not afraid of him? It was my turn to shrug. What could he do to me? But I also had a personal question. He had shaken my hand when we first met. Why did he do that? Did he not think it is forbidden for members of the opposite sex to touch? "You remind me of my mother," he answered. I have not talked to his mother, but she is often in my thoughts.

Another postscript

While in prison in the 1990s, Abu Mohammed 'Aasim al-Maqdisi shared a cell with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, whom he proudly claimed to have mentored in the theories of *jihad*. Al-Maqdisi eventually disowned al-Zarqawi's methods, renouncing the killing of civilians, and did not support al-Zarqawi's successors in Iraq. In late June 2014, the group formerly known as Al Qaeda in Iraq renamed itself *ad-Dawlah al-Islāmiyah*, alias the Islamic State, and declared a worldwide caliphate under the leadership of its self-appointed caliph. Al-Maqdisi, whose hallmark intellectual contribution has been the prohibition on accommodation with the secular state, denounced the move.

Al-Maqdisi sees himself as a public intellectual who does battle for jihadism with words. But he also hands out licenses to kill. Nonetheless, he claimed in an interview with Joas Wagemakers, a Dutch professor in Islamic intellectual history, to be "illiterate" in the world of fighting and to have confined himself to the "quiet" life of writing and preaching.[46] This is false modesty: he was arrested in 1994 and charged with keeping explosives in his house. He was arrested and sent to prison again in 2000. In 2014, he was convicted in Jordan of rendering service to the armed struggle. In his

writings, he continues to endorse and encourage murder. Nonetheless, the Jordanians released him.

Out of prison, al-Maqdisi reunited with his old friend and intellectual sparring partner, Abu Qatada al-Filistini, who was also released by the Jordanian government. Qatada and al-Maqdisi have quarreled in print, and al-Maqdisi has second-guessed the 9/11 attacks which Qatada holds in high regard. But when the two towering figures in the jihadist intelligentsia are seen in public together, they appear as the best of friends.[47] It may be that they take the injunction to love "other Muslims" seriously. It may also be that their disagreements in writing are less serious than they may seem. As any public intellectual knows, you have to keep the controversies running to keep the readers engaged.

Qatada is rabidly anti-Semitic. It should not be a surprise but it is shocking to see Nazi propaganda getting recycled. January 2016, Qatada released a video of himself lecturing on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a notorious anti-Semitic tract used by the Nazis to justify the persecution of Jews. In the video, Qatada denied the Holocaust and claimed, among other things, that Jews use blood for Passover matzos.[48] The video was the twenty-fourth in a series of Qatada's video lectures titled "1,000 Books before Death." In another video, released by Qatada in August 2017, he returned to an old theme: "the raiding of Rome," a reference to the Islamic army's retaking of the West.[49] Meanwhile, the war against the Islamic State raged a day's drive away and refugees poured into Jordan. Warrior states inevitably have preachers of war. The preachers stay alive. The soldiers die.

In 2019, al-Maqdisi and Qatada were back to quarreling, this time over the direction of Al Qaeda under Ayman al-Zawahiri's leadership. Always the company man, Qatada defended the current line as "inclusive," while al-Maqdisi played to his reputation as an independent thinker and criticized the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (previously known as *Jabhat al-Nusra*) of appeasement and signaled his respect for theologians who formerly belonged to the Islamic State (which al-Maqdisi had condemned five years previously).[50]

Notes

1. Hegghammer, *The Caravan*.
2. Aaron, "In Their Own Words," 68.
3. Aaron, "In Their Own Words," 68.

4. Lahoud, *Jihadis' Path to Self-Destruction*, xvi.
5. Bin Laden, "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places."
6. Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, 137.
7. Bonnichsen, *Hånden: en PET- og politikrønike*.
8. Zedong, "U.S. Imperialism Is a Paper Tiger."
9. Miller, "Who Is Bin Laden?"
10. I wish to thank my friend, Tøger Seidenfaden. Tøger died in 2011, much too early.
11. Mazzetti, "Getting a Free Pass: Anger Over a Deal to Release a 'Terrorist.'"
12. Aagaard, "Guantanamo-fange i varetægt."
13. Giebner, "Den danske Cubafange."
14. BBC, "London Bomber."
15. Dewast, "'I Thought I Was Going to Die,' London Bombing Survivor Says 10 Years Later."
16. Eltahawy, "After London, Tough Questions for Muslims."
17. Mirza, Senthilkumaran, and Ja'far, "Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the Paradox of Multiculturalism," 14.
18. Armstrong, "Hate the Sin, Love the Sinner."
19. Yuksel and Laith Saleh al-Shaiban, *Quran: A Reformist Translation*.
20. al-Zawahiri, "Loyalty and Enmity."
21. The video could for a period be seen here https://vimeo.com/246403560. It has now been removed.
22. Pantucci, "A Biography of Rashid Rauf," 12–15.
23. Ardolino and Roggio, "Bin Laden Directed al Qaeda's Global Operations From 'Command Center' in Pakistan."
24. *New York Times*, "The Guantanamo Docket."
25. Weaver, "Lost at Tora Bora."
26. Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*, 35–72.
27. Council on Foreign Relations, "The Sunni-Shia Divide."
28. Cragin, "Al Qaeda Confronts Hamas," 576–90.
29. Le Figaro, "Tariq Ramadan Mis En Examen Pour Le Viol de Deux Autres Femmes."
30. Fourest, *Brother Tariq: The Double Speak of Tariq Ramadan*; Berman, *The Flight of the Intellectuals*.
31. Yuksel and Laith Saleh al-Shaiban, *Quran: A Reformist Translation*.
32. The Quran, Surah At-Tawbah [9:31]. The translation quoted is available on https://quran.com/9/31?translations=101,21,20,19,17,95,18.
33. Maqdisi, *Democracy: A Religion*.
34. Wagemakers, "Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi."
35. McCants, Brachman, and Felter, "Militant Ideology Atlas"; Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi. The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*; Shaheed, *The Lofty Mountain*.
36. I am grateful to Aaron Y. Zelin and Cole Bunzel for help with dating the text.
37. Leiken, "Europe's Angry Muslims."

38. Hesse, "Interview with Olivier Roy: Muslim Radicals Are Perfectly 'Westernized.'"
39. Roy, *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*.
40. Davidsen-Nielsen and Seidelin, *Danskeren På Guantánamo: Den Personlige Beretning*, 159.
41. al-Mohammad, "ISIS Child Soldiers in Syria."
42. Davidsen-Nielsen and Seidelin, *Danskeren På Guantánamo: Den Personlige Beretning*, 48.
43. Taarnby Jensen, "Jihad in Denmark," 27.
44. Klausen, *The Cartoons That Shook the World*.
45. *New York Times*, "The Guantanamo Docket."
46. Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi. The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi*, 38; Warrick, *Black Flags*; Hassan, "The Sectarianism of the Islamic State."
47. Bunzel, "Abu Qatada Al-Filastini"; Malik et al., "How Isis Crippled Al-Qaida."
48. "Jordanian Cleric Abu Qatada Al-Filistini Discusses The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, States." To view this video-clip on the MEMRI TV website, go to: http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/5284.htm.
49. MEMRI, *Salafi Jordanian Cleric Abu Qatada Al-Filastini: True Islam Leads to Raiding Rome and Confrontation In a Recent Address*.
50. Bunzel, "Rehabilitating the Bin'aliyya: Al-Maqdisi and the Scholarly Remnant of the Islamic State."

9
Made in the USA

Bin Laden's diary, discovered in the Abbottabad compound in 2011, records that he was urging the recruitment of American citizens, not necessarily Muslims, who were from minority ethnic groups, particularly African-Americans and Latinos. They would be directed to mount attacks in New York and Los Angeles as well as in smaller cities across the United States.[1] Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM) began scouting for American volunteers before the 9/11 attacks. KSM's interest in American passport holders was pragmatic. When informed that an American passport holder, José Padilla, was unwilling to carry out a suicide mission, he observed that many recruits were willing to volunteer for martyrdom but "not all brothers could work in the West." KSM had a mission in mind for Padilla and sent him back to the United States.[2] The minute he stepped off the plane at O'Hare airport in Chicago on May 8, 2002, Padilla was arrested and held as a material witness to the 9/11 attacks.

The effort to stimulate "homegrown" terrorism in the United States was an adaptive response to the problem Al Qaeda faced launching attacks inside the United States after 9/11. Broad changes were made to enforcement and border protection with the passage of the USA PATRIOT ACT on October 21, 2001, and Congress subsequently passed a series of measures to tighten border security and scrutiny of visa applications.[3] In the new environment, recruiting Americans became a tactical necessity. An American passport allowed operatives to get around border security. With time, the difficulties associated with getting operatives infiltrated translated into redoubled efforts to recruit Americans online.

Many of the American homegrown helpers have typified the "incompetent, ineffective, unintelligent, idiotic, ignorant, inadequate, unorganized, misguided, muddled, amateurish, dopey, unrealistic, moronic, irrational, and foolish" and "gullible" domestic terrorists described by John Mueller and Mark Steward in a scathing critique of what they termed the U.S. government's "delusional"

anti-terrorism enforcement policy after September 11.[4] And although Mueller and Steward's description is broadly accurate, it ignores the fact that the American recruitment networks did produce some very effective operatives, a few of whom even joined the top ranks of Al Qaeda. At the risk of over-generalizing, it appears that the most effective American jihadists went abroad. Those who stayed back—or went to training camps but were then directed to do "something" at home—were on the whole less competent, if not always as "ineffective, unintelligent, amateurish, dopey," etc., as Mueller and Stewart asserted.

This chapter will introduce some Americans who moved up the ranks in Al Qaeda: the "fearsome" ones that Mueller and Stewart left out. But there is no typical profile of a Western jihadist. Psychological motivations are complex and cannot easily be generalized. No one-size-fits-all theory can explain why somebody becomes a terrorist. And people's motivations can change. The personal experiences or personality traits that initially lead a person to adopt extremist beliefs or to join a radical group may at a later time give way to quite different ideological motives when the person is ready to carry out a violent strike or to become a suicide bomber. Yet while it is impossible to predict *who* becomes a jihadist terrorist, factors like age, gender, and social background influence *what* the would-be terrorist will do, and I will discuss who is likely to do what in a terrorist network. Finally, the chapter will present new findings from my research on the pathways followed by Americans who become committed jihadist terrorists.

The Americans are on the whole more likely to be converts to Islam than are their European counterparts. Many have committed criminal acts before they embraced extremist Islam. They are less—much less—likely to have the thick network connections to others who joined the global movement and foreign terrorist groups. When they carried out terrorist attacks, they sometimes had received instructions from movement operatives based abroad, either by traveling and obtaining training in bomb making and terrorist trade craft or from online contacts. More often, they acted on their own with inspiration and assistance from friends and coaches they found online.

For a period, it even looked as if the jihadist movement had almost lost traction in the United States. Then the Islamic State happened.

The would-be dirty bomb-maker

José Padilla (alias Abdullah al-Muhajir) was allegedly primed to carry out a so-called "dirty bomb" attack in the United States, using an improvised

explosive device (IED) packed with radiological material. But he was also given the option of doing something "simpler," like blowing up natural gas pipelines under large apartment buildings.

There is no doubt that Padilla was tasked by KSM to do "something" spectacular. Padilla had 10,000 dollars on him when he was arrested, which certainly would not have been enough to pay for illegal radiological material on the black market, if he could find any to buy. He may have been able to call on an infrastructure of helpers and facilitators in the United States, but he had nothing like the network that supported the 9/11 hijackers behind him. No co-conspirators in the United States were identified during the prosecution of Padilla.

Padilla was born in 1970, in Brooklyn, N.Y., to parents from Puerto Rico. The family moved to Chicago, where he joined a street gang as a teenager. He was arrested five times while still a teenager and spent three years in juvenile detention. In 1991, he was arrested in a road rage incident in Florida and, once again, sent to prison. In 1994, while in prison, Padilla changed his name to "Ibrahim." Out of prison, Padilla worked in restaurants and hotels.[5]

In 1998, Padilla left Florida together with a friend, who had also radicalized. The two men moved to Egypt initially to study Islam and learn Arabic. There, Padilla married an Egyptian woman with whom he had two children. He was at that time still married to his American wife, who divorced him in 2001.

In June 2000, Padilla went to Afghanistan where he enrolled in Al Qaeda's Al Farouq training camp, which was located near Kandahar. This was home to Al Qaeda's top brass. Padilla is alleged to have met them all: Mohammed Atef, Abu Zubaydah, Ammar al-Baluchi, and Ramzi Binalshibh, the handler for the 9/11 hijackers. The U.S. military later found Padilla's entrance application to the Al Farouq camp. The form was made an exhibit at the trial.[6] Padilla had put down his language skills—English and Spanish—and also that he was a U.S. citizen as his qualifications.

The U.S. government's indictment identified 1993 as the year when Padilla became involved in the global *jihad* network through a recruiter at a local mosque in Broward Country, Florida. The Florida network tied Padilla directly to the old *al-Kifah* funding network that by then had fallen into the hands of Omar Abdel-Rahman, the "Blind Sheikh" in Brooklyn, and to Bin Laden's organization.[7] It turned out that the FBI had been watching the South Florida group in the early 1990s, presumably because of the ties to Abdel-Raman. In a call recorded by the FBI and later presented in court,

one of Padilla's co-defendants discussed with another how he and Padilla had visited the Blind Sheikh. The two men in the call, Mohamed Hesham Youssef and Kiffah Wael Jayyousi, both ran chapters in the al-Kifah funding network and another Al Qaeda-linked charity known as The Global Relief Fund.[8]

Was Padilla a fearsome terrorist, like the 9/11 hijackers, or was he one of the "dopey" and "delusional" would-be domestic terrorists described by Mueller and Stewart? Padilla was never tried on charges related to a dirty bomb project. Most of what we know about his plans comes from a statement made by James Comey, who in 2004 was the deputy attorney general for the U.S. Department of Justice.[9] More information came from Padilla himself.

The facts as they can be pieced together from public sources are as follows. At the training camp, Padilla was given basic training in the construction of IEDs and the use of explosives, machine guns, and other dark arts. And, as always, the recruit was given religious training. After getting a new American passport and following a brief trip back to Egypt, Padilla returned to Afghanistan in June 2001. Padilla was asked to return to the United States on a mission and agreed. He was then introduced to various top Al Qaeda operatives, including KSM in Karachi, Pakistan, and was assigned to work with another American operative, Adnan Shukrijumah. The two men knew each other from Florida and the Broward County circle.[10]

But Shukrijumah and Padilla did not get along, so Padilla was given a new partner (charges were eventually dropped against the alleged partner who will not be named here). In November 2001, when the U.S. military assault on Al Qaeda's bases in Afghanistan caused Al Qaeda to move its fighters out of the country, Padilla was relocated to a safe house in Pakistan. At this point he supposedly came up with a plan for a dirty bomb that he and his new partner had discovered on the internet. The plot was allegedly shelved as being too complicated. KSM instead proposed setting fire to gas stations or blowing up an apartment building (or several apartment buildings) by exploding natural gas lines in a metropolitan American city.

Evidence that was provided by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Abu Zubaydah could not be used in a civilian court because the two were—and still are—detained in Guantanamo Bay. Both men had been held in secret CIA prisons abroad and subjected to so-called "enhanced interrogation methods," including forced nudity, sleep deprivation, and waterboarding. Any statements made by them would have been sceptically received in a court of law.

The fact that Padilla, a U.S. citizen, had been sent by Al Qaeda recruiters to carry out an attack on American soil less than a year after the 9/11 attacks caused the Bush administration to test the legal framework for dealing with terrorists associated with Bin Laden's group. On June 9, 2002, President George W. Bush designated him an enemy combatant and claimed that he was therefore that he was not entitled to a trial in civilian courts. Padilla was transferred to a military prison in South Carolina where he was held for three and a half years as an "enemy combatant." The Bush administration argued that the United States was "at war" with Al Qaeda and therefore it had the right under the Authorization for Use of Military Force against Al Qaeda (AUMF) passed by Congress on September 18, 2001, to hold Padilla in "indefinite detention" irrespective of his rights as an American citizen. Lengthy court challenges followed, which twice ended up before the U.S. Supreme Court without the court ever making a decision on the constitutional issues.

In 2005, the government withdrew the "enemy combatant" argument and indicted Padilla and four other men in federal court on charges related to conspiracy to murder and kidnap Americans overseas.[11] The indictment linked him to the Florida-based cell raising funds for jihadist fighter groups. He was convicted in August 2007 of conspiracy to commit murder and providing support to terrorists. None of the charges related to the dirty bomb plot or to the alleged plot to blow up gas lines in Chicago. Padilla was sentenced to seventeen years and four months in prison. Another four years were added to his sentence after an appeals court ruled that the initial sentence was too light. The prosecution ran into difficulties both because evidence collected from alleged co-conspirators abroad had been tainted by torture and because of a general problem facing all international terrorism prosecutions: it is difficult to collect evidence that can be used in court from zones where law enforcement has no eyes or ears, and no ability to serve a search warrant.

Padilla is currently held in a maximum-security prison in Colorado with an expected release date of 2026.

Americans in Al Qaeda

Adnan Shukrijumah grew up in Miramar, Florida. He was born in Saudi Arabia in 1975 and moved with his father, who was an imam, to Myanmar

and then to the United States in the mid-1980s. The family lived in Brooklyn until the mid-1990s, where Adnan's father worked as a translator for the Blind Sheikh in Brooklyn. The family later relocated to Florida, and Shukrijumah went to Broward Community College in Fort Lauderdale, where he may have obtained a degree in computer engineering. He went abroad in 1997 or 1998 but was back in the United States in 2001. He is suspected of having had contact with some of the 9/11 hijackers. (Shukrijumah had a pilot's license.) He was put on the FBI's wanted list in 2003.

By this stage, he was no longer an obscure recruit. After KSM was arrested, in 2003, he was promoted to take over part of KSM's portfolio. In that capacity, Shukrijumah helped to organize an attempt to bomb the New York City subway and other targets in New York in 2009. (This operation was modeled on the 2005 London Underground bombings.) Although there is much we do not know about Shukrijumah, we know enough to place him near the top of a list of dangerous and competent Americans who rose in the ranks of Al Qaeda. He was killed by Pakistani forces in a raid in northwest Pakistan in 2014.

Another example of an American who rose in the ranks of Al Qaeda is Adam Yahiye Gadahn. One of very few Western converts to Islam who gained notoriety and achieved high rank in the movement, Gadahn played an important part in rebuilding Al Qaeda after 2001. After Al Qaeda's exodus from Afghanistan in 2001, the organization could no longer rely on the attraction of the camps to bring in new recruits and had to find a new way to connect with the masses. In 2001, Gadahn started Al Qaeda's media division, *As-Shahab* ("The Cloud"). Although he was not involved directly in fighting, his media operation contributed to the resurgence of Al Qaeda. The FBI placed Gadahn on its terrorist wanted list in 2004, nine years after he started identifying with the extremist belief system.

Gadahn had an unusual background.[12] He was born in Oregon as Adam Pearlman into a family that was both Jewish and Christian. His parents later changed their name to Gadahn, taking the name of an Old Testament warrior. Gadahn's middle name, Yahiye, is the Arabic name for John the Baptist. (This is his given name, not an assumed name. His parents chose an Old Testament name alluding to the shared scriptural heritage between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.) He was raised as a Christian and was homeschooled. As a teenager, he became involved with an alternative music culture known as death metal. He started to express interest in Islamic radicalism and

converted when he was seventeen. He was briefly enrolled in the University of Southern California before dropping out of school.

As a new convert Gadahn joined a local mosque, the Islamic Society of Orange County, where he met Hisham Diab and Khalil Deek, two veterans of the Bosnian *jihad* who were also the leaders of Charity Without Borders, one of the many fundraising fronts linked to Al Qaeda. In 1997, Gadahn assaulted his former mentor at the mosque. It is a type of aggression that is not uncommon among recently radicalized fanatics. Diab and Deek sponsored Gadahn's travel to Pakistan in 1997, where he came into contact with the Pakistani jihadi underground and AQ. Deek collaborated with Abu Zubaydah, who managed a guesthouse for Al Qaeda and funneled people to the Al Farouq training camp. This may have been Gadahn's entry point to Al Qaeda.

Gadahn was no warrior. Bookish and chubby, his skills lay elsewhere. In 1998, he moved to Pakistan and married an Afghan woman. We do not know when Gadahn joined AQ, but it was around his the time of his move to Pakistan. He appears to have earned his stripes as an assistant to Bin Laden. By 2004, Gadahn had become the face of Al Qaeda to English speakers, expounding Al Qaeda's ideology and praising its actions in ponderous tones on YouTube. He was killed in a drone strike in Pakistan on January 19, 2015.

Other high-profile examples of Americans who made it to the top in the jihadist world are Jehad Marwan Mostafa (Mustapha), a San Diego native, who joined the Somali *Al-Shabaab*, and John Georgelas, a white convert who joined the Islamic State. Mostafa went to the University of Southern California-San Diego and graduated with a major in Economics He is probably the least known of the famous American jihadists. He was initially charged in American courts in absentia in 2009. A superseding indictment filed in 2019 described him as "the highest-ranking U.S. citizen fighting overseas with a foreign terrorist organization."[13] A surreal video emerged in 2011 showing Mostapha standing in the middle of a desert camp for displaced people that was controlled by Al-Shabaab. Addressing hundreds of women and children sitting on the ground in front of him, he identifies himself as an ambassador from Al Qaeda to Al-Shabaab, bringing food aid to the needy.[14]

Georgelas grew up in a well-to-do family in Texas, the son of a Texan U.S. Army veteran.[15] He suffered from brittle bone disease and several other medical complications as a child. His family was Greek Orthodox but he converted to Islam during his college years, initially embracing Sufism. In 2001, he traveled to Damascus, supposedly to study Arabic. Afterwards he

moved to London where he became involved with *al-Muhajiroun* and the British extremist milieu. In 2003, at the age of nineteen, he married a young woman, also nineteen, whom he first contacted on an Islamist dating site. (Omar Bakri Mohammed, the leader of *al-Muhajiroun*, encouraged his followers to marry women in the movement.)

The young family moved back to Texas, and for a period lived also in California. His first arrest related to his growing extremism was in 2006, when he was working as a data technician for a company called Rackspace, a computing services company in Dallas. He used his access to hack the website of a client, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. In 2011, the family moved to Egypt, but not for long. In 2013, Georgelas and his wife and their three young children migrated to the Islamic State. Georgelas somehow attracted the attention of Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, an ISIS spokesman, chief strategist, and manager of foreign terror operations. With the benefit of Adnani's patronage, he soon made a reputation as an interpreter and a "public intellectual" in the service of the Islamic State. Allegedly, he used his computer skills to become a producer in the Islamic State's English-language media services. He is presumed to have died in Syria in 2017. At some point, Tania, the wife, rebelled against the living conditions and persuaded Georgelas to take the family back to Turkey. She now lives in Texas and has renounced her former life.[16]

Another American who made it into the top rank of an Al Qaeda organization was Omar Hammami (Abu Mansur al-Amriki), who joined *al-Shabaab* despite his lack of Somali ancestry. Hammami grew up in grew up in Daphne, Alabama, and was raised as a Southern Baptist. He embraced a radical version of Islam while in high school and went to Somalia in 2006 where he joined fighters from the Islamic Courts Union, a group that later morphed into *al-Shabaab*, Al Qaeda's Somali affiliate. He became a media star, appearing on *Al Jazeera* recruiting for *al-Shabaab* in his American-accented English. He created a YouTube account on which he, among other things, live-streamed a guerilla ambush on Ethiopian troops from the bush somewhere on the Horn of Africa, providing voice over in English. After some internal quarrels, Hammami started criticizing the leadership and fell out with the leaders of the group. The conflict grew murderous and, in April 2013, Hammami live-streamed an attack on himself by his former comrades in *al-Shabaab*. By coincidence, I was showing my students Hammami's online account when he put up the dramatic video of himself bleeding

from a neck wound. Hammami was killed in September 2013 by his former comrades in *al-Shabaab*.[17]

Then there was Anwar al-Awlaki. It is not possible to discuss Americans who helped build the so-called "homegrown" base for Al Qaeda in the United States without mentioning Anwar al-Awlaki, the entrepreneurial imam, online preacher, and relentless plotter of attacks. Al-Awlaki was born in New Mexico while his father was studying for a Ph.D. at an American university. He grew up in Yemen, the son of a government minister and the president of Sana'a University, the first university in the Republic of Yemen. Al-Awlaki returned to the United States in 1991 when he was twenty years old to go to college. In 1994, he graduated from Colorado State University with a B.S. in civil engineering. Al-Awlaki's story is well-known. Here, it suffices to say that between his American citizenship, his decade-long life in the United States, and his American accent, his Americanness is hard to ignore.

Al-Awlaki was an exceptionally influential propagandist—and remains so, even after his death in an American drone strike in 2011.

The post-9/11 jihadists

Three distinct cadres of American recruits may be distinguished in the years following the 9/11 attacks. First were Americans who had been mobilized before the 9/11 attacks and who left the United States before the attacks or shortly afterwards. A handful of these men helped rebuild Al Qaeda after 2001 by creating highly effective online media organizations. Their education and skills acquired in the United States were valuable assets. Padilla, Gadahn, and Samir Khan belong in this group.

A second group was based in Falls Church, Virginia, a suburb to Washington D.C. The network had begun to send volunteers to the Pakistan-based *Lashkar-e-Taiba* before the 9/11 attacks. At that time Lashkar's camps trained its own recruits but also admitted militants referred by Al Qaeda. The Falls Church men regretted that they had missed out on the action in Bosnia and were fired up by the idea of getting military training. One of the men, Randall Todd Royer, had taken leave from college in 1994 and 1995 to travel to Bosnia, where he successfully joined the jihadist Arab fighter brigade. He married a Bosnian woman and began traveling back and forth between Washington D.C. and Bosnia. In 1999, he tried to join the

next fight in Kosovo but failed and returned to the United States. Members of the group then attempted to join the action in Chechnya, but that also turned out to be impossible. Royer went to Pakistan again in early 2000 to make contact with *Lashkar*. He said he was visiting his pregnant wife in Bosnia, but allegedly his intention was to go to Chechnya. In the event, working from an office in Lahore, he helped *Lashkar* set up a website. He returned to the Washington D.C. suburbs in midsummer 2000 and helped other members of the group make contact with *Lashkar*.

The Falls Church group comprised about twenty men who met at each other's houses and spent weekends going to shooting ranges and playing paintball games to develop their military skills.[18] Because of their devotion to the paintball exercises, the group became known as the Virginia "Paintball Jihad" network. Three or four members of the inner circle who had a military background conducted the exercises. Their initial aim was to fight with the jihadists in Kashmir against India but after the September 11, 2001, attacks their focus shifted to fighting with the Taliban against U.S. troops in Afghanistan. None of the men made it to Afghanistan.

Following the September 11 attacks, the men debated whether Islam "allowed" the killing of civilians. A week after the attacks four of them obtained visas to Pakistan on the pretext of going to a wedding and visiting family. Eventually, eleven men from the group were arrested, charged with terrorism-related crimes, and put on trial.[19] Three were African-American, five were of Middle Eastern descent, one was a South Korean convert, and two were white converts to Islam. (All but two were found guilty.) Yong Ki Kwon, a naturalized U.S. citizen born in Korea, appears to have been the only one to have seen military action while in Pakistan. Saifullah Chapman was a U.S. Marine veteran and a Black convert.

The detailed seventy-five-page statement of facts written by the judge hearing the case, Leonie M. Brinkema, of the Eastern District of Virginia, in Alexandria, provided a reasoned forensic account of the defendants' intentions. Statements made to the court by cooperating co-conspirators make clear that the men had shifted their focus from Kashmir to heed a call to join the fight against U.S. troops in Afghanistan made by Mullah Omar, the head of the Islamic Emirate and Bin Laden's host in Afghanistan. Going to the *Lashkar* camps was a way to get military training that they hoped to use somewhere else.[20] In fact, they never made it even close to any fighting. In December 2001, the men were ordered to go home to "do something." As it turned out, that something included the purchase of advanced drone

technology that was sent on to Lashkar through a British-Pakistani intermediary.

The group's spiritual leader, Ali al-Tamimi,[21] was tried separately. At a meeting on September 16, 2001, he had issued a "*fatwā*" instructing his followers to go to Afghanistan. They were to destroy the "ruling" after reading it.

Al-Tamimi was born in Washington, D.C. and grew up in the suburbs. His parents moved to Saudi Arabia when he was a teenager, but al-Tamimi somehow came under the influence of a well-known British-Canadian extremist preacher, Bilal Philips. Philips was born in Jamaica but grew up in Canada. He is a convert to Islam who has set up a thriving online extremist ministry. His preaching has gotten him banned from a long list of countries. He taught for a period in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Philips was an unnamed co-conspirator in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing trial. He is thought to be responsible for converting a number of Black U.S. soldiers.[22] Al-Tamimi returned to the United States to go to college and, after graduating spent a few years in Saudi Arabia before he moved back to the Washington D.C. area to go to graduate school. In the late 1990s, he started preaching at a center in Falls Church, Virginia, where he also became acquainted with Anwar al-Awlaki.[23] He was a well-known figure in Salafist circles in the United States and his trial became a lightning rod for critics of the government's approach to domestic terrorism. In 2005, Al-Tamimi was convicted of soliciting treason in connection with his involvement with the northern Virginia recruitment network and sentenced to life imprisonment.

In 2015, after a series of appeals, a court sent the case back for review on the grounds that the FBI withheld evidence during the original trial. Research conducted by Scott Shane for his book, *Operation Troy*, revealed that the FBI had al-Tamimi under surveillance earlier than disclosed during the trial. Moreover, the FBI had attempted to recruit Anwar al-Awlaki as an informant. The FBI's records turned up a connection between al-Awlaki and al-Tamimi that had not been revealed in court during the first trial.[24] Allegedly, al-Awlaki turned up at al-Tamimi's house in 2002 and asked him to recruit men for the armed *jihad*. In June 2019, Judge Brinkema reopened part of the convictions against al-Tamimi for review. New information about Awlaki's involvement on the periphery of the group and FBI's failure to disclose the alleged effort to recruit him as an undercover agent could theoretically lead to a new trial.

The members of the Virginia Paintball network got some help from the U.S. Supreme Court in 2018, when the court redefined when what

constitutes a "violent crime" was changed. As a consequence, Judge Brinkema, who had objected to the mandatory sentence guidelines that sent the Virginia men to prison for life, ordered the release of some of the Virginia Paintball network. Chapman who had been sentenced to 85 years in prison was released in July 2019. Ismail (Randall) Royer now works for a center in Washington D.C. that seeks to combat extremism and dissuades people from joining the ranks of terrorists.[25]

The members of group were well-educated college graduates and students from middle-class families in suburban Northern Virginia. Three were veterans. Al-Tamimi obtained a Ph.D. in computational biology shortly before he was incarcerated. Their commitment may be hard to understand, but none of these men fits Mueller and Stewart's description of American domestic terrorists as "dopey," "incompetent," or "gullible." They were enamored by the idea of warfare and motivated by perverse idealism.

Another group formed before September 11 that recruited for Al Qaeda was based in Queens, New York. The Islamic Thinkers' Society was a rare example of a brick-and-mortar recruitment hub. In 1999, Omar Bakri Mohammad formed a branch of the British *Al-Muhajiroun* at the Masjid al-Fatima mosque in Queens. (In the late 1990s, the mosque had been associated with *Hizb ut-Tahrir*.[26]) The Queens group attracted perhaps two dozen followers. They began to stage demonstrations in Times Square in New York City, imitating the provocative slogans used by Bakri Mohammad's followers in London. The group did not last long but its members later turned up in a number of conspiracies, all of which were unsuccessful. (See Textbox 9.1. for a description of some of the individuals associated with the group.) Members of the Islamic Thinkers' Society moved on to produce an influential website, RevolutionMuslim.com, which established a virtual network of multiple hubs across the United States and in Canada and Europe. The web-based network groomed some of the United States' best-known "homegrown" terrorists.

Another recruit to the Queen's network was Mohammed Junaid Babar, a Pakistani-American. He grew up in Queens, where he came into contact with the British *al-Muhajiroun*. Babar moved to Pakistan one week after the 9/11 attacks. He was an unlikely recruit to the cause. His mother worked in the World Trade Center and escaped from the collapsing building after the attack. Babar joined the British *al-Muhajiroun*. In Pakistan he became coordinator for recruits heading to training camps after Al Qaeda reestablished itself

in Pakistan's tribal areas. In that capacity, he provided assistance to the July 7 bombers and their collaborators who were involved with a foiled attempt to blow up limousines in central London, and also a failed second attack on the London Underground on July 21, 2005.[27]

Sajeel Shahid, a British-Pakistani man established the chapter in Queens before he moved to Pakistan to set up a guesthouse in Lahore for *al-Muhajiroun* members traveling to training camps in Afghanistan.[28] It is not known if Babar met Shahid in New York, but Babar left New York shortly after the 9/11 attacks and went to Pakistan where he worked for the Software Export Board, a front for *al-Muhajiroun* run by Shahid. He stayed on in Pakistan but made frequent trips to London where he attended meetings in the Finsbury Park Mosque and met with both Abu Hamza and Bakri Muhammad.[29]

A number of violent plots were linked directly and indirectly to the Queens, New York group. Before they moved to Pakistan, both Babar and his friend Syed Fahad Hashmi spent time in London. They were associated with *Al-Muhajiroun*, and they met with the perpetrators of the London Underground bombings. Babar returned to the United States in 2004 and surrendered to the U.S. authorities. He would later testify to having participated in bomb-making training with Omar Khyam and other participants in the foiled plot to use fertilizer bombs in London, and with Mohammad Sidique Khan, the leader of the London Underground attacks. Babar was released early from prison in 2010 because of his cooperation with the U.S. Attorney's Office in several terrorism prosecutions.

Babar also collaborated with and gave evidence against Dhiren Barot[30] (aka Issa al-Hindi), who did reconnaissance for the 9/11 bombers on behalf of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in New York City and Washington D.C. in August 2000. Barot and seven other men pleaded guilty in 2007 to plotting to use dirty bombs in limousines to blow up targets in London and New York City. (Like others before them, they were not in possession of radiological material when they were arrested.)

Hashmi moved from New York to London in 2003 after receiving his B.A. from Brooklyn College, and enrolled at London Metropolitan University, graduating with a master's degree shortly before he was arrested. On a trip to Pakistan, in 2003–2004, Hashmi met up with Babar and Omar Khyam. Hashmi was arrested in London in 2006 at Heathrow Airport, as he was about to board a plane for Pakistan. He was extradited to stand trial in in federal court in New York where he pleaded guilty to providing material

support to Al Qaeda. On June 10, 2010, Hashmi was sentenced to fifteen years in prison.

Bryant Neal Vinas, a Hispanic convert, was also a member of the Islamic Thinkers Society. He hung around with the New York clique for some years and then, in 2007, went to Pakistan, where he was taken to an Al Qaeda training camp in North Waziristan. He participated in a rocket attack on American troops in Afghanistan and was trained to carry out an attack in the United States. Arrested in Pakistan in 2008, he was returned to the United States and charged with multiple terrorism offenses, including plans to bomb commuter trains traveling between Long Island and New York City. Vinas pleaded guilty in 2009.

Inspire magazine, an online English-language production published by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), was al-Awlaki's brain child but it was produced with the help of another American, Samir ibn Zafar Khan. It was in fact a direct descendant of a website created by Khan, who was a member of the Islamic Thinkers' Society based in Queens. Khan began his career as an online jihadist entrepreneur in 2003, while he was living in Queens, publishing his own blog under the online handle *Inshallahshaheed* (God willing, a martyr).[31] Khan moved with his parents to North Carolina, where he lived until he moved to Yemen in 2009 to work as Anwar al-Awlaki's webmaster. Until that time, he continued working on various websites. He was killed together with Anwar al-Awlaki in a drone strike in Yemen in 2011.

The American-Somali recruitment network based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was another exception to the rule that the American networks have little geographical definition and rarely build up a sizeable following. Between 2007 and 2009, about two dozen youths from the American-Somali community in Minneapolis-St. Paul and some of their friends who were converts left the United States, or attempted to do so, to join Al Qaeda's Somali affiliate, *Al-Shabaab*. In October 2008 one of the youths, Shirwa Ahmed, killed thirty people in an attack on aid workers in Somalia, becoming the first American suicide bomber for a jihadist organization (as far as we know).[32]

Al-Shabaab's name means "The Youths" in Arabic.[33] It was formed in 2006 from a radical youth organization under the by then defunct Union of Islamic Courts, which in the 1990s had attracted Bin Laden's support. The leadership was drawn from Al Qaeda's ranks and the group integrated local

recruits with international brigades of Arab fighters displaced from Yemen and youthful militants from Somali immigrant enclaves in the West.

The American-Somali recruits were children of refugees from previous waves of civil war and generally did not speak the local languages. They traveled, against the objections of their families, ostensibly to seek out "uncles," brothers, and cousins in Somalia, but in fact looking for action on the jihadist frontline.

The American-Somali network later branched out to join the Yemen-based affiliate, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Then, after 2013, new recruits aimed to get to the Islamic State. This willingness to shift allegiance from one group to another raises difficult questions about their motivations. The initial association with a Somalia-based Al Qaeda affiliate was seen as an expression of diaspora extremism but this theory was problematic. Their parents had been driven abroad by the very same militias that their children now sought to join. Many of the travelers were mere teenagers. Perhaps they regarded their travels as a sort of aberrant gap year, and an opportunity to experience a form for ethno-political authenticity. That explanation went out the window when the youths instead tried to join the Arabian-dominated Islamic State. (Heidi Ellis and her colleagues at Children's Hospital in Boston have published excellent studies of the social and psychological dynamics that drew the American youths to, first, *Al-Shabaab* and, then, through the contagion networks of brothers and cousins went on to join the Islamic State).[34]

The migration of volunteers from the United States and Europe to the Somali Al Qaeda affiliate has abated but *Al-Shabaab* is still active and remains a threat in the region. In December 2019, it carried out a lethal attack in Mogadishu. In 2020 it targeted military bases and civilian targets across the border in Kenya.[35] A splinter group joined up with the Islamic State in 2015 but *Al-Shabaab* has stayed in Al Qaeda's orbit. Recent reports are that, like other jihadist fighter groups in North Africa, that has looked for support from regional powers that share the groups' anti-American agenda, *Al-Shabaab* allegedly now receives support from Iran.[36]

The scorecard

The central managers belonging to Al Qaeda Central (sometimes also referred to as Al Qaeda "Core") have not managed to stage a single successful

attack in the United States since the 9/11 attacks. The closest call came in 2009, when three men, Adis Medunjanin, Zarein Ahmedzay, and Najibullah Zazi, who grew up in Queens and attended Flushing High School, were discovered to be plotting suicide bombings targeting the New York City subway and other high-profile sites.[37] The three radicalized together under the influence of the Islamic Thinkers Society and spent many hours bonding while watching online extremist videos. In 2008, they traveled to Pakistan, planning to join the Taliban to fight against the United States. Once there, they were directed to an Al Qaeda training camp. In South Waziristan they met with Adnan Shukrijumah, who brought in top brass from Al Qaeda: Rashid Rauf and Saleh al-Somali.

The young men were directed to return to the United States to carry out attacks in New York City. In January 2009, they bought the necessary chemicals and started to prepare the bombs. The plot was discovered when intelligence agencies in Britain and the United States picked up an email message between Zazi and his handlers dealing with technical questions about bomb making. Zazi had lost some pages from his notes with the recipe. The plot was quickly unraveled and the men arrested.

Incidents that could have proven more deadly under different circumstances include an attempt to bomb Times Square in 2010 that fizzled because the fuse failed to detonate the bomb. The bomb-maker, Faisal Shahzad, a thirty-year old naturalized U.S. citizen who had wanted to become a foreign fighter in Afghanistan (his father denied him permission), was arrested and later told investigators that he had been trained in making the bomb at a camp in Waziristan by members of the Pakistani Taliban.

And then there was the Boston Marathon Bombing in 2013. The bombs carried by the two brothers went off and killed three people. (The Tsarnaev brothers are the subject of Chapter 10.) If not for the presence of large numbers of first responders at Marathon goal line and the proximity to several hospital, many more people could have died. The brothers made their own bombs following a recipe published in *Inspire.*

The unavoidable conclusion is that, since 9/11, Bin Laden and KSM's complicated script for spectacular coordinated terrorist extravaganzas has been far less successful than Awlaki's DIY "Open Source *Jihad*" manual.

The concept of "open source *Jihad*" was introduced in the second issue of *Inspire*, their online magazine: "Look no further, the open source *Jihad* is now at hands reach (*sic*)." The issue, published in October 2010, gave

instructions on how to use a pick-up truck "as a mowing machine, not to mow grass but mow down the enemies of Allah." Later issues featured a serialized manual on how to put together a terrorist attack and injunctions to "do something; pick up a gun" and "how to make a bomb in your mother's kitchen." The magazine and Awlaki's video would turn up as a source of inspiration in countless violent incidents in the United States. Like any good online guru, Awlaki developed an easy to follow to-do list for his followers. Called "44 Ways of Supporting *Jihad*," it listed forty-four easy things to do in order to qualify as a proper jihadist. (This was the jihadist equivalent of the 99-cent burger. The first imperative is getting the customers in through the door.)

Top of this list of easy things to do was to "have the right intention." Then came "fighting the lies of the Western media" and doing "www.Jihad." Trying was as good as succeeding. Lowering the threshold for fighting the good fight became linked to a new tactic of warfare. The accumulation of mini-attacks, even if they failed, the argument went, would eventually bleed the colossus to death. Like Bin Laden, Awlaki believed that the United States could not tolerate deaths and would overextend itself in the effort to stop terrorism.

As part of the Western Jihadism Project, we have identified 181 Americans who relied on Awlaki or *Inspire* (and often both) for their inspiration and sometimes directions for what to do.

The six most deadly attacks after 2001 in the United States committed by people who dedicated their acts to Al Qaeda or an Al Qaeda affiliate are listed in Table 9.1. Three are attributed to ISIS but in no case have we been able to ascertain that external ISIS officials exercised any direct managerial oversight. The attacks followed the script of DIY terrorism. The most lethal took place in 2016 at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. A twenty-nine-year-old man, Omar Mateen, entered the club and started shooting. At some point he called 911 and took responsibility for the attack. Mateen dedicated his life to ISIS, but he had never traveled to Syria, and no close connection to the group was established. The ISIS news agency, *Amarq*, did, however, claim Mateen as an Islamic State fighter.

The second-most lethal attack in the United States was another shooting. In December 2015, a husband-and-wife team, Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik, shot up a Christmas party of county employees, many of whom were work colleagues of Farook, in San Bernardino, California. They killed fourteen people and seriously injured twenty-two. The couple

Table 9.1. High-casualty incidents in the United States after 9/11

Incident	Date	Casualties	Attribution
Pulse Nightclub Shooting (2016)	12/06/2016	49	ISIS
San Bernardino Shooting (2015)	02/12/2015	14	AQAP/ISIS
Fort Hood Attack (2009)	05/11/2009	13	AQAP
West Side Highway Attack (2017)	31/10/2017	8	ISIS
Chattanooga Recruitment Center Shooting (2015)	07/16/2015	5	Undetermined

Source: Western Jihadism Project.

planned to detonate a pipe bomb that would have hit the first responders rushing to the scene, but the remote-control mechanism failed.[38] The couple credited their attack to the Islamic State, which acknowledged their contribution to the cause.

The third most lethal attack occurred at a military base, Fort Hood, Texas, and was carried out by a former army major, Nidal Hasan. Hasan was in email communication with Anwar al-Awlaki.

The fourth incident took place in October 2017, on Manhattan's West Side Highway. The attacker, Sayfullo Saipov, drove a truck into bicyclists on the bike path that ran along the highway. The attack was part of spate of incidents in the United States that involved using trucks to ram into pedestrians and bicyclists that all apparently followed instructions provided in *Inspire* magazine.

At fifth spot is a drive-by shooting in 2015 at two army and navy recruitment centers in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The shooter was motivated by online jihadist propaganda but no direct connection to any foreign terrorist organization was established.

It is axiomatic in counterterrorism circles that the threat equals intent plus capacity. (It could be argued that instead of "plus" the integer should be "times." Either way, this is not math but a way of analyzing uncertain data.) Over the years, Al Qaeda's intent has never waned but between KSM's failed "Second Wave" and his successors' ineffectual efforts to coordinate attacks in the United States, it is apparent that the organization's capacities have been eroded. Effective counterterrorism policies at home and abroad, as well as (controversial) international eavesdropping on online communications played a role. The ability of the international networks to recruit, to

plan, and to execute attacks on American soil were clearly degraded. Controlling online recruitment and terrorist training proved harder to control. Ultimately, the inability on the part of the terrorist planners to infiltrate teams of experienced fighters to carry out attacks on American soil the way both Al Qaeda and ISIS were able to do in Europe left the job to inexperienced and, with some notable exceptions, often incompetent locals.

Geographical diffusion

Today's American jihadist networks look very different from the bustling extremist community that formed around the Egyptian cleric, Omar Abdel-Rahman in Brooklyn, which was responsible for the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993. Then, offshoots of the Brooklyn hub were set up in mosques and in charities that had been started by militant immigrants to support the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan. Afterwards, the geographical bases of jihadism changed radically. Now, terrorism offenders inspired by Al Qaeda and its satellites in Africa and on the Arabian Peninsula are represented in all fifty states, including Alaska, and in over a hundred cities.

Most striking is the shift from the East Coast cities, New York and the Washington D.C. area in particular, to the South and the Midwest. The geographical distribution of American jihadist activists is made apparent in this heat map, which marks the hometowns of over seven hundred "homegrown" jihadists who have been arrested or are known to have gone abroad to join a foreign terrorist organization. (See Figure 9.1.)

The new geographical pattern of recruitment reflected, in part, the far greater salience of online grooming of would-be travelers and stay-at-home attackers in the United States compared to Europe. Recruitment was also stimulated by the glamour of the "Caliphate." The ISIS effect was felt in the United States, and north of the border, in Canada. By the end of 2015, the FBI had 900 ongoing investigations related to ISIS. These led to record-breaking numbers of arrests and prosecutions.[39] Three years later, the FBI director Christopher Wray told Congress that his organization had 1,000 ongoing investigations linked to the Islamic State. The number of prosecutions was nonetheless dwindling; down dramatically from a peak year in 2015 when fifty-seven people were charged with offenses related to the group.

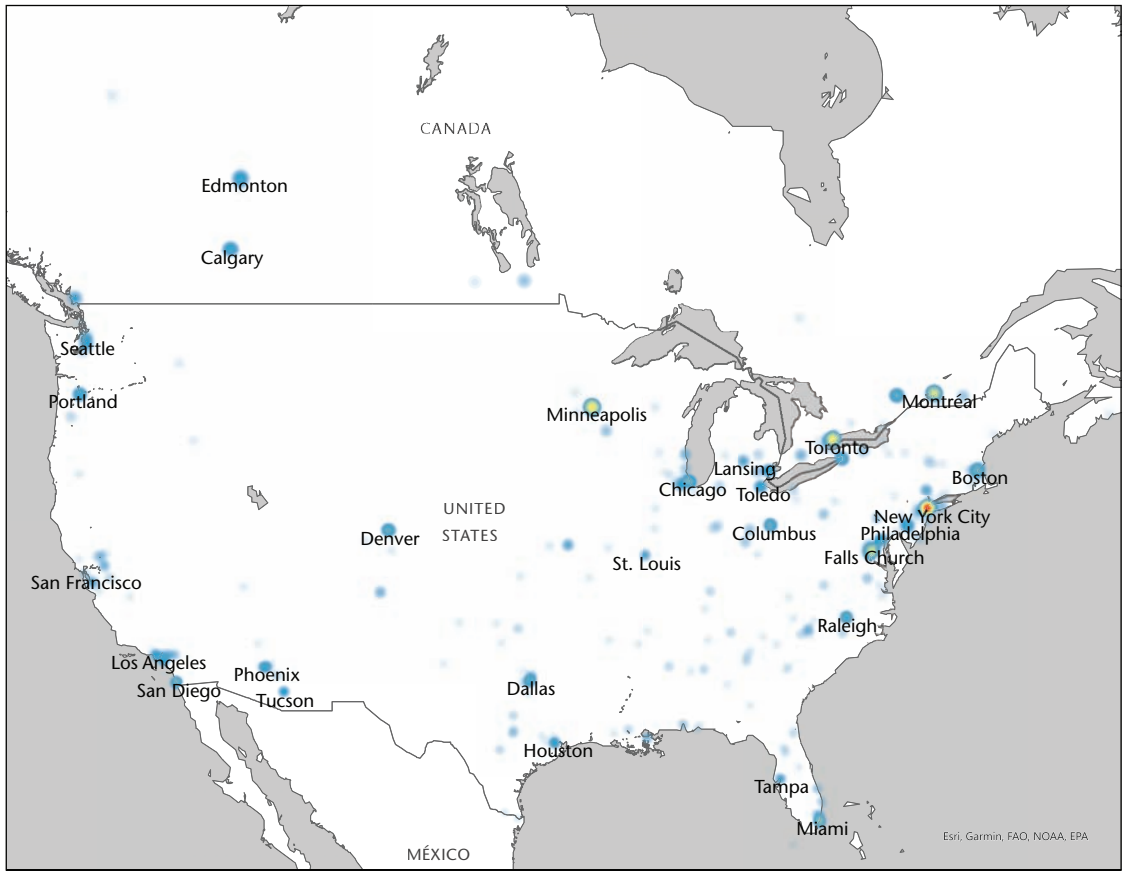

Figure 9.1. Density map showing the hometowns of "homegrown" North American terrorism offenders and foreign fighters.

N: 738 Americans and 172 Canadians who committed terrorism offenses, died in the pursuit of such offenses, have outstanding warrants, or are publicly known to have traveled to jihadist training camps or insurgent zones between 1990 and 2019.

Source: The Western Jihadism Project. Map created by Rosanne Libretti with ArcGIS Pro.

Who are the American jihadists?

A picture has emerged of today's jihadists as delusional youths who have fallen prey to online recruitment tactics. There is some truth to the stereotype, but it is also true that the most common "homegrown" jihadist terrorist is a man in his mid to late twenties.[40] Popular perceptions of who becomes a homegrown terrorist are often misleading. The concept of homegrown terrorism is exceptionally fuzzy. It has no legal meaning and cannot easily be translated into clean sociological distinctions. It is commonly used to refer to adherents of the global jihadist movement who have no ancestral or direct personal relationship to the grievances that gave rise to jihadist insurgencies in Muslim majority countries in the 1980s. They are individuals who have embraced the ideas and practices of the globalist revolutionary jihadist movement while growing up in Western democratic societies. The term is used here to refer to converts to Islam, American citizens, and the homegrown descendants of earlier generations of Muslim immigrants who have radicalized while living in the United States.

No single demographic profile fits all homegrown terrorists. Some recruits are middle-class and college educated. A few even have advanced degrees. Others have histories of delinquency, including drug abuse and violent criminality. Some are mere youths. Others are middle-aged. Most were not overtly religious before they became involved in extremist circles. A significant number are converts. It is impossible to identify a common set of grievances, or even common motivations, that led them all to join groups that espouse violent *jihad*.[41]

There are no official statistics for the number of Americans who have engaged in criminal terrorist actions on behalf of the global jihadist movement. The government collects statistics on prosecutions but even those are unclear because some people have been tried in state rather than in federal court. Academics tend to have their own particular research objectives and use different criteria for the inclusion of subjects. My focus here is the identification of Americans who qualify for the designation of "homegrown" extremists. The concept has no legal meaning. It is an ambiguous if sometimes useful concept that we use because we are puzzled as to why people who have grown up in the United States—or any other Western democracy—should choose to join a movement that, as Bin Laden put it, declared

war on the Americans, its Western allies, and the local "tyrants," meaning all governments in Muslim countries save the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The Western Jihadism Project identified and coded 724 U.S. residents who, between 1990 and 2019, committed domestic terrorism-related offenses or traveled abroad to join a jihadist insurgency, and who are known to still be abroad or to have died abroad in connection with terrorism-related actions.

Of the 724 people, close to 8% (57) were women. Converts numbered 227 (36%), meaning that they did not grow up with Muslim parents but at some point converted to Islam. (A different study by the New America Foundation arrived at similar estimates from a dataset that was put together using slightly different inclusion criteria.[42]) The timing of their conversion can be tricky to assess but we found that many, certainly a majority, converted to Islam at more or less the same time as they embraced extremism. To put it another way, they found Islam through the extremist program rather than finding extremism through Islam.

The data collection records a range of demographic and social variables. One distinguishes immigrants and those we call homegrown. The concept of "homegrown" is not a question of legal status but rather a sociological concept. To be included as homegrown the person has to be either an American citizen or have arrived in the United States before the age of fourteen, lived in the United States during their formative teenage years, and radicalized in the United States. People who moved to the United States as adults and became citizens by naturalization are coded as "immigrant." On these definitions, 485 (67%) individuals in our database were homegrown Americans.

The remaining one-third who we classified as immigrants may or may not have radicalized after their arrival in the United States. It is often hard to ascertain if people come with their extremist beliefs already fully formed and with a plan in mind. In a few cases we do know for certain that a particular person did hold extremist views before coming to the United States. Tashfeen Malik, the wife in the husband-and-wife team responsible for killing in the Christmas party attack on December 2, 2015, is a case in point. We do not know if her marriage was part of the plan and if she came to the United States determined to carry out an attack. The Tsarnaev brothers who carried out the Boston Marathon Bombing came as immigrants. We know for certain that they did not arrive with an intention to become terrorists.

Demographic variables can only tell us so much. To repeat, there is no demographic profile which can predict who is likely to become a deadly terrorist.

The median age at which the Americans in the study first did something terrorism-related was twenty-six. Median values are different from average values. The median value is the midpoint where 50% of the cases fall below and the other 50% case fall above the value. Because of the long tail of a few much older offenders, averages (mean values) are do not provide a good description of the population.

This may come as a surprise. The stereotype is that jihadism is a young person's crime, like gang membership. In fact, jihadist terrorism is generally an adult crime.[43] However, the age variation across different action type was significant. (The age statistics reported here cover the entire population of Americans who committed a terrorist act or fought abroad with a jihadist group. The age reflects when a person first committed the particular offense.) Because of the large spread in ages for the different categories of terrorism offenders, the table reports the age of the youngest offender (fifteen or sixteen years old, contingent on the offense), the median and average values, and the maximum value, giving the age of the oldest offender in the category. People who carried out the violent attacks—at home or abroad—were significantly younger than those who took on nonviolent support tasks such as fundraising, recruiting, and proselytizing. (See Table 9.2 for a list of the age statistics by action type.) Nonviolent offenders were on average ten years older than those who became foreign fighters: 32.5 vs. 23 (median values).

The term "foreign fighter" refers to an individual who, for reasons of ideology or kinship, goes abroad to join a non-state group that is engaged in an armed conflict.[44] The term is also used to include women who travel abroad to join a group in the global jihadist orbit. The United Nations formulation, from which this definition is drawn, is gender neutral.

Individuals who did "something" violent at home were on average four years older than the foreign fighters. It factors into the interpretation of the data that the standard deviation was large, 6.5 years in the case of the foreign fighters (the youngest was fifteen and the oldest fifty). Even if, on average, statistically significant differences exist with respect to the age at which people are likely to choose one role over another, a wide age spread is generally found between the youngest and the oldest perpetrators of violent

Table 9.2. American terrorism offenders by age and action type, 1990–2019

Age	Nonviolent only (Fundraising, recruitment, preaching) Violent	domestic plots (No foreign fighting)	Foreign fighting (No violent domestic plots)	Both violent domestic plots and foreign fighting	Total
Median	32	26	24	24	26
Min	16	15	15	16	15
Max	71	62	50	52	71
Mean	34	28.5	24.5	24.9	27.7
Std. Dev.	11.1	9.6	6	6.3	9.2
N	134	255	259	76	724

Source: Western Jihadism Project. Median refers to the age at which 50% of the population was older and the other 50% younger.

attacks. The findings strongly contradict stereotypes about American jihadists as hapless teenagers.

Nevertheless, clearly, age matters greatly for the type of role people play in the service of the movement. Younger people go abroad. Older people stay at home, either to carry out a domestic attack or to undertake support roles.

American converts

It is often assumed that the converts attracted by jihadism are African-Americans with some background in the various groups and splinter groups on the fringes of the Nation of Islam. This is not generally true. Among the 227 converts identified in the data collection, White converts comprised 43%, Black converts 33%, and Latino converts 12%. (We were unable to identify race or ethnicity in seven cases. Twenty-one were classed as "other." These include Vietnamese, Chinese, and a range of other ethno-racial categories who did not fit in the Black or White categories.) The converts were overwhelmingly American citizens (94%). Just over 10% were female; 88% were considered homegrown on the definition given above.

White converts played a significant part in American jihadism. Daniel Patrick Boyd, a white convert, traveled with his brother to fight in Afghanistan in the late 1980s. The brothers were arrested in Pakistan and charged and convicted in connection with a string of bank robberies, apparently carried out to raise funds for the *mujahideen*. They were released in

1992 and returned to the United States with the assistance of the U.S. government. His brother, Robert, appears to have had enough, but Daniel brought his family into the struggle. Between 2006 and 2008, Boyd and his group, which by that time had grown to include other youths from the area in Raleigh, North Carolina, where they lived, tried to enter Gaza to carry out violent actions against Israel. They then attempted to join the struggle in other countries, but failed again. Boyd also plotted to mount attacks against domestic targets, including the U.S. Marine Corps base in Quantico, Virginia.[45] In 2011, he pleaded guilty to planning terrorist attacks in the United States and abroad.[46] Two of his sons were sent to prison along with him.

The terrorist careers of Adam Yahiye Gadahn and John Georgelas, both also white converts, were discussed earlier in this chapter.

Many of the American Muslims who ended up going abroad grew up in secular families. With the exception of the Boyd family, where the father was a white convert, I cannot think of any of the young Americans who went off to fight with Al Qaeda, al-Shabaab, or ISIS who were brought into the global *jihad* by their parents. It is one more difference between the American and the European social contexts. In Europe, multi-generational extremism is still uncommon but is nevertheless seen more often.

Black Americans in Al Qaeda

KSM's interest in recruiting Black Americans was probably stimulated by Omar Abdel-Rahman's reliance on members of a sect of Black Muslims, who provided various services for his group in Brooklyn between 1990 and 1993. Rahman also made use of African-American converts who belonged to *Jamā'at al-Fuqra* (*Jamaat al-Fuqra* in English transliteration). In recent years this group has called itself "Muslims of America" (MOA). Its role in the 1993 terrorist cell has largely been ignored, but it was not insignificant.[47]

In the early 1990s, *Jamaat al-Fuqra* was a loose mix of criminal gang and religious sect. It was formed in Pakistan, but the American members were—and still are—primarily African-Americans.[48] Their Dar ul Islam mosque was close to Abdel-Rahman's location on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. Members of the movement provided security at the al-Kifah Center on Atlantic Avenue. It was a Brooklyn-centered *milieu*, but it must be remembered that Brooklyn was a very different place in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Now lined with bars selling craft beer, Atlantic Avenue was then teaming with storefront meeting places. Anarchists would put out their shingle next to tarot card readers, Hassidic clubs and makeshift mosques.

Among Abdel-Rahman's recruits from this milieu were two veterans of the *jihad* in Afghanistan, Clement Rodney Hampton-El, alias "Dr. Rashid," and Carl Dexter Taylor, alias Abu Ubaidah Yahya.[49] Hampton-El had accompanied Abdullah Azzam on tours in the United States in the late 1980s. He had also fought in Afghanistan, where he was severely wounded. He was convicted in the 1993 bombing trial. Taylor was listed as a co-conspirator but was not indicted.

Two members of an *al-Fuqra* affiliate based in the Southwest were found guilty of the murder of the Tucson-based imam, Rashad Khalifa.[50] Glen Francis, alias Benjamin Phillips, was arrested in Canada in 2009 on charges related to the murder and sentenced to life in prison in 2013. (His DNA had been found at the murder scene.) Phillips belonged to a Fuqra cell in Colorado known as "Sector 5 of Muhammad Commando." The other killer, James Donald Williams, was also a convert and had joined the same group. The leader of the Muhammad Commando group was Edward Finton, a registered sex offender, who pleaded guilty in 1997 to having planned the murder, and also to having conducted an arson attack against a Hara Krishna temple in Denver in 1984.

Founded by a Pakistani sheikh, Mubarik Ali Gilani, *al-Fuqra* is a militia-type organization. The group still exists but its members have not in recent years shown up among the Americans who have attempted—and sometimes succeeded—to do something on behalf of the foreign terrorist organizations in the global jihadist movement. It has been described as a paramilitary way station to Al Qaeda and also as a kooky sect whose members are Black criminals with a mission.[51] The sect favors actions that fall somewhere between hate-crimes and ordinary crime. Group members live in compounds that are typically located in isolated rural areas and include training sites where military instruction is given. It increasingly resembles white militia groups and the sprawling anti-federalist Sovereign Citizens movement.

In the 1990s, Gilani preached at one of the Fuqra-affiliated mosques in Brooklyn in the 1980s.[52] He also owned land in the Colorado Mountains, where Fuqra members established a training compound. When the FBI raided it in 1992, agents found a large number of AK-47 rifles and rounds of ammunition. Another compound was located in the Catskill Mountains in

New York State. A Canadian branch of the sect has also been involved in politically motivated crimes. Members were arrested in 1991 in connection with a plot to blow up a cinema in Toronto frequented by Hindus.[53] Following the 9/11 attacks there were serious concerns about "sleeper cells," and the FBI once again raided several of the compounds affiliated with the sect.[54]

Over the years, Gilani has cropped up on the margins of several terrorist plots. The so-called shoe-bomber, Richard Reid, an English Afro-Caribbean who ended up in an Al Qaeda training camp in the early 2000s, was allegedly among his recruits. Reid is supposed to have visited Gilani's compound in Lahore.[55] Daniel Pearl, journalist who was murdered by KSM, was on his way to Gilani's compound in Karachi, Pakistan, to interview him about Reid, abducted in January 2002.

Criminality

Prison radicalization is often assumed to be the main route by which Black Americans have been drawn into jihadist terrorist networks. However, the evidence is ambiguous. One-third of all converts (not just Black converts) had criminal convictions for offenses unrelated to the jihadist ideology before they became radicalized.

Still, troubled personal biographies do generally set apart Blacks and Latinos as a subgroup of the American Jihadist population. Many are converts, and many have a criminal background or other indicators of social alienation. The women in particular may be seeking refuge from troubled lives. Becoming a terrorist or seeking martyrdom may be part of a personal quest for meaning or redemption.

Although some militants did convert to extremist forms of Islam while in prison, worries about prison radicalization may be overblown. It is not always easy to determine at what point people were drawn to extremism, but in many cases—about half—radicalization occurred after release from prison. Nevertheless, there is a strong association between criminality and participation in violent domestic conspiracies. People with a history of criminal activity that predates their radicalization seldom become involved with fundraising, for example. A history of criminal violence also makes former criminals attractive targets for terrorist agents who are seeking out Americans to carry out violent attacks.

The story of Marcus Dwayne Robertson is especially bewildering. An African-American and a convert, he grew up a Baptist in a prominent Brooklyn family. Whether he is a fabulist or wants to cover up for years working as an undercover agent (or both), there are not enough years in his life to fit in all his alleged activities. He claimed to have served as a U.S. Marine, and he supposedly spent several years in Mauretania, where he ran a school, all the while acting as an undercover agent for the FBI. Later he was a Muslim chaplain at the federal penitentiary in Leavenworth.

In the early 1990s, Robinson commanded a gang called The Forty Thieves. (The name was not taken from the Arabian Nights. His gang was named after a famous Irish gang from the early 1820s that had been based in the notoriously gang-ridden neighborhood known as Five Points on New York's Lower East Side.) Robertson and his Forty Thieves shot police officers, planted improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and robbed banks, post offices, and private homes at gunpoint. Gang members also provided security for public housing projects, selling drugs on the side.

The gang also provided security for Abdel-Rahman at the al-Kifah center in Brooklyn, and participated in assassinations ordered by Abdel-Rahman in his campaign to take control of a string of Muslim charities that collected money for the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan. Robertson supplied Abdel-Rahman's group with guns, and trained Nosair's cell on Atlantic Avenue in the use of the weapons. He allegedly handed over $300,000 from his bank robberies to Abdel-Rahman, who reciprocated by issuing a religious ruling that bank robberies were *halal*—religiously acceptable—if *zakat* (tithe) was given to the mosque.

When Robertson was arrested in July 1991, for bank robbery, he was twenty-two years old. He told the FBI that he was a soldier for the global *jihad* and robbed for Allah. His story was laid out in full in a sentencing memorandum from 2014 that was published by the *Washington Post*.[56] He became a witness for the prosecution against the rest of the gang, and was released from prison in 1994.[57]

It was then that he went to Mauritania. It is not clear when he returned to the United States, but he has said he worked for the Los Angeles Police Department for two years and then for a Wall Street company. His most recent incarnation was as an imam at a small mosque in Orlando, Florida. He combined that job with being an online sheikh. Starting in 2010,

Textbox 9.1. Life stories: Black converts

Narseal Batiste was arrested in 2006 and found guilty in 2009 on charges relating to what is known as the Sears Tower plot, a fantastic conspiracy that aimed to bring down buildings in Chicago, to bomb the FBI office in Miami, and, among other things, to poison salt shakers in restaurants. Batiste was radicalized in the early 1990s. He had previously been convicted on drugs charges. Six of the seven co-conspirators had prior criminal backgrounds. All belonged to the Moorish Science Temple, a sect involved in other instances of violent political extremism. The Temple considers itself Muslim and blends martial arts with religion. Batiste led the other six men in paramilitary training in an abandoned warehouse in Miami. The group was caught on surveillance videotape swearing *bayat* to Bin Laden. Batiste was sentenced to thirteen years and six months in prison, and thirty-five years of supervision after his release. In 2007, KSM released a signed confession in which he listed a plot to blow up the Sears Tower as part of a second wave of attacks to follow the 9/11 attacks, but there is no evidence that the relationship of these men to Al Qaeda was anything more than aspirational.

Kevin James was charged with terrorist conspiracy in October 2005. He had been incarcerated for armed robbery in 1997 and converted to Islam while in prison. James formed his own militant group, *Jam'iyyat Ul Islam Is Saheeh* (JIS), which he operated from within prison. The group's founding principles included, among other thing, attacking enemies of Islam and the establishment of a caliphate in the United States. In prison, James converted Levar Haley Washington, who, after his release, recruited two other men, Gregory Patterson and Hammad Samana, to attack targets in L.A. Led by James, this small, self-contained gang unraveled when they started robbing gas stations. The three men were arrested and imprisoned. When James was released, in 2019, the government requested that he be monitored to prevent him from committing new terrorism-related offenses,

Carlos Bledsoe was arrested in June 2009. He pleaded guilty to a variety of charges and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Bledsoe had killed one person and injured another in a shooting attack against a military recruitment center in Little Rock, Arkansas. Bledsoe self-described as a gang member. He was raised as a Baptist and was converted, in 2004, at the age of twenty, to extremist Islam. He traveled to Yemen in 2007 and spent sixteen months there, taking religious instruction from Anwar al-Awlaki. He was detained in Yemen for overstaying his visa and for

(*Continued*)

Textbox 9.1. Continued

possessing a false Somali passport. (He had tried to go to Somalia to join *al-Shabaab*, Al Qaeda's Somali affiliate.) He was returned to the United States in 2009. On June 2, 2009, Bledsoe took along an SKS rifle, a Mossberg International 702 rifle with a scope and laser sight, a Lorcin L-380 semi-automatic handgun, a.22 caliber handgun, and over 550 rounds of ammunition, to the Little Rock recruitment center. Before beginning the attack, he threw a homemade IED at the home of a rabbi in Nashville, Tennessee. No one was harmed. Bledsoe claimed in a letter to the court that he had killed a man "who robbed and terrorized Muslims" in Tennessee in 2006 before going to Yemen.

Abu Khalid Abdul-Latif (Joseph Anthony Davis) pleaded guilty to planning an attack in 2011 against a Seattle, WA, military processing center. He had converted to extremist Islam while in prison. His co-conspirator, Walli Mujahidh (Frederick Domingue, Jr.), was also a convert. Latif had an active profile on a dating site, where he explained he was looking for a second wife who did not mind sharing him with his other wife. He and his co-conspirator were heavily invested in the online jihadosphere and belonged to Sharia4USA, an online organization created by Anjem Choudary in London. Latif had wanted to go to Yemen to join Anwar al-Awlaki before he decided to plot a local attack.

Robertson had a second act as a charismatic imam, traveling and giving lectures. He also ran a prolific (and profitable) internet site proselytizing for jihadism under the *kunya*, Abu Taubah. (The website was called the Fundamental Islamic Knowledge Seminary (FIKS). It had a link to the website of a school in Nouakchott, Mauritania called The Darul Arqam Institute.) By now Robertson was living in Orlando, Florida, with fifteen children from three wives. Two of the sons have serious genetic ailments. An older daughter was a student at University of Chicago.[58]

In 2010, Robertson was seen speaking on a YouTube video at a conference at the Green Lane Masjid in Birmingham, England. Sitting to his right is another fire-breathing preacher, an American, Abu Usamah adh-Dhahabi, originally from Passaic, New Jersey, who had settled in the United Kingdom. This was one of many stopovers as Robertson traveled the world, addressing large audiences in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Sri Lanka, and visiting Seattle, Washington, Chicago, IL, and New York City from his base in Orlando, Florida.

Robertson favored a shock-jock rhetorical style. A video (no longer available) showed him speaking to a predominantly Somali audience at Foster High School in affiliation with Highpoint *Masjid* in Seattle, Washington, in March 2011. He said, among other pearls of provocation:

> "Boys who wear their pants around the butts are gay. This is not manly."
>
> [...]
>
> "Don't mix with *Kuffar* [the infidel]! They are not even potty trained. These people do not even know how to go to the bathroom properly!"
>
> [...]
>
> "Standing for the Star Spangled Banner is haram [forbidden]."
>
> [...]
>
> "Don't imitate Black Americans...Islam is the only solution. It only works if you commit wholeheartedly. Don't mix with any kind of nationalism. Black nationalists mixed with pseudo-Islam and it didn't work."

Robertson was arrested again in August 2011, in Florida, on charges of unlawful possession of firearms and for tax avoidance. He was also charged with training a young Latino convert, Jonathan Paul Jimenez, in skills necessary to "participate in violent *jihad* overseas."[59] When I started tracking Robertson online, he had a video on YouTube requesting that donations be sent to an account with Morgan Chase in New York. The site was later repurposed to solicit donations to pay for his defense after his arrest.[60]

Robertson pleaded guilty to the firearms charge and was sent to prison. His sentence was reduced because the judge accepted Robertson's defense that he had worked undercover for the FBI, including spending years abroad tracking terrorist networks. This was true. A memorandum submitted by Robertson's defense, based on records supplied by the U.S. government, confirms that Robertson testified for the prosecution in a federal trial in 1999, acted as a "spy" for the JTTF and the FBI in Mauretania between 2004 and 2007, and then served as a confidential source in terrorism (and apparently gang-related) cases from Atlanta to Los Angeles.[61] The memorandum also reported that Robertson and his family were given new identities in 1997 or 1998.

In excerpts provided by the defense attorneys of conversations between Robertson and a third person, who unbeknownst to Robertson was a government informant, Robertson was heard providing advice on how to cheat on taxes. In a suit against the U.S. government filed in 2012, Robertson

claimed that during his years abroad and on his travels, he attended meetings with government intelligence officials and was sent on missions to places where the U.S. government could not go.[62] Reporters were not allowed to attend most of the trial. It is not known why the recruitment charge was dropped. Robertson was released in June 2015. It is difficult to work out what parts of his story were true, but he was probably a committed extremist and also an entrepreneur who made a good income from the U.S. government.

Women

Aafia Siddique is the most famous woman in the movement. She became so famous that she was nicknamed "Lady Al Qaeda." A university student in the Boston area at the time of the 1993 World Trade Center attack, Siddique is from an upper-middle-class Pakistani family. She came to the United States as a student and went on to become a neuroscientist with degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Brandeis University, where she was awarded a Ph.D. in 2001. (We overlapped at Brandeis, but I did not know her.)

While she was a student at MIT, she worked at the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF) on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston. The charity raised money in the United States for Bin Laden, and this may be where she moved on from being active in a local Muslim Students' Association to assuming responsibilities in Al Qaeda. In 2002, Siddique came to the attention of the FBI because her husband's credit card was used to buy body armor, night vision equipment, and books that explained how to make bombs. She was also accused of having transferred money to the 9/11 hijackers on behalf of KSM, and, later, of having acted as a courier for Al Qaeda, smuggling money and diamonds.[63]

In 2002, Siddique gave birth to her third child and divorced her husband. She then married a nephew of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Abdul Aziz Ali (aka Ammar al-Baluchi), who was a member of Al Qaeda's inner circle. He is one of the seventeen high-value detainees who are still held in Guantanamo Bay. Siddique then disappeared for five years. After a murky interlude, difficult to disentangle, she was arrested in Afghanistan, in a midsized city on the road between Kabul and Kandahar, in July 2008, and was found to

be carrying two plastic bags that held a whole library of instructions on how to make chemical and biological bombs and lists of targets in New York City.[64]

Siddique was taken into custody, but at some point a gunfight broke out. She tried to shoot the guards but failed and was shot and injured. When her identify was discovered she was transferred to U.S. custody and sent for trial in New York. She is now serving a life sentence. Few terrorists have generated as much press as Siddique. She is seen as martyr and a role model for a new generation of Western women who aspire to become *mujahideen* in their own right. She is also a cautionary lesson about not taking anything for granted about the roles that women may play in the global movement. Siddique was old school. She married into the movement and conformed to the expectation that she would be a wife and a combatant.

Hoda Muthana, from Hoover, Alabama, was studying business at the University of Alabama when she went to Syria in 2015, at the age of twenty. Her parents had immigrated to the United States from Yemen in 1992, and all their children, including Hoda, were born in the United States. Her father tried to enforce "old country" rules in the family. Hoda and her sister were forbidden to have social media accounts or to talk to anyone who was not a relative, for instance.

However, Hoda still managed to partake in online communities and, in time, was radicalized primarily through these online channels. Her command of technology eventually enabled her to travel to the Islamic State.

After she graduated from high school in 2013, Hoda Muthana received a smartphone as a present from her father but when he discovered she was using Facebook on her phone, he started regularly checking up on her. He found only apps related to Islam, e.g., on *Hadiths* and the *Qur'an*, and mistakenly thought she had discovered religion. Secretly, she managed to maintain a Twitter account.

In interviews conducted over Kik, an encrypted app, Hoda later explained to a journalist that she became interested in jihadism (which she described as "Islam") in 2012, just before her graduation from high school. She began planning to move to Syria in November 2013 and one day, a year later, she left home and travel to Syria to join ISIS. She had claimed that she was going on a class trip and then called her sister the next day to say where she was going. When her father called her, she was already in Syria. She paid for the ticket using her tuition money.

In December 2015, Muthana called her family again to say that she wanted to come back home and asked for money. The family refused. The next time she called it was to say that she had married an Australian fighter withISIS. She was then calling herself "*Umm Jihad*." Her husband was killed in an airstrike in March 2015 after they had been married for three months. Muthana was radicalized online through her hidden Twitter account, which she also used to communicate with extremists linked to ISIS. One such contact was Aqsa Mahmood, a Scottish jihadi bride. Muthana's handles included @ZumarulJannah and @AhlulDhikr. Her public tweets were inflammatory: "Terrorize the *kuffar* [infidel] at home," she tweeted, "Americans wake up!"[65]

Tweeting from the "caliphate," she exalted in her new status. An inflammatory picture posted on her account showed her gloved hand holding her American passport. She was with three other women, each holding a different passport. The text accompanying the picture read "Bonfire soon, no need for these anymore." The Islamic State routinely staged symbolic bonfires of passports to signify the "state-ness" of its pseudo-state. In January 2016, the Obama administration revoked her passport on the grounds that she was not a birthright citizen because her father was a diplomat when she was born. Her citizenship was in dispute because her father's severance as a Yemeni diplomat was not made official until after her birth. This would mean that her American passport had been issued in error. In November 2019, a federal ruled that she does not have American citizenship. It seems unlikely she will be allowed to return to the United States. She is now effectively stateless.

Three marriages to men who were fighters for the Islamic State (two died, one husband she divorced) and the birth of a son later, Muthana was among the women who washed up in a displaced persons camp in eastern Syria in January 2019. A frank description of the Islamic State's sexual economy and who got to have sex with which women can be found in an interview Rozh Ahmad did with a former ISIS fighter in a detention camp. The interview provided a detailed picture of how women, as the spoils of war, were distributed to the fighters by the commanders—who also got the "best" women, it seems.[66]

It can be incredibly difficult to dissuade radicalized individuals from taking off to join their imagined dreamland. Shannon Maureen Conley, a nineteen-year-old Colorado woman, was living at home with her parents when she first drew attention to herself in October 2013. She turned up at a church that had been subject to a mass shooting in 2007, attending service

while wearing a Muslim headscarf and ostentatiously making notes about the layout of the church. When church workers started to talk to her she became hostile and babbled about terrorism. She later admitted that she had been doing a "reconnaissance" exercise.

It is unclear if she was acting on her own initiative or was following instructions. Conley was involved with a thirty-two-year-old Tunisian man online, who was (allegedly) anISIS fighter in Syria and who had promised to marry her. She was also in contact with "a sister" in Syria. Trained as a nurses' aide, she planned to become a nurse in the Caliphate if she was not allowed to fight.

Her parents collaborated with the FBI and agents met with her and told her that they were from the U.S. government, and warned her that she would be arrested if she carried on. She still tried to leave. She was arrested in April 2014 at Denver airport and charged with attempting to join ISIS.[67]

Roles in the struggle

Homegrown jihadists engage in a variety of activities on behalf of the movement. These range from proselytizing to undertaking violent incidents at home. A simple classification scheme was used to sort all actions into three broad categories: becoming a foreign fighter by joining—or trying to join—a foreign jihadist organization; carrying out a violent attack at home or in another Western country or attempting to carry out such an attack; or supporting the global *jihad* through criminal but nonviolent means. The latter includes providing material support to a terrorist organization (e.g., buying and shipping equipment, or purchasing an airline ticket for someone else to travel to join an organization), fund raising, issuing threats (but not acting on such threats), and a range of other supportive acts.

Organizational sociology provides a lens for explaining segmented patterns of career opportunities in organizations, and many of the dynamics causing stratification in ordinary organization also apply to "dark" networks. Typically, the relative status hierarchies promoted within organizations are based on ethnicity, race, and masculinity. We saw in Chapter 5 how rank in the organizational culture of the jihadists was determined by seniority and by proximity to the founders of Al Qaeda. On the basis of these insights, we assumed that Americans overall are low status in the global jihadist movement

and their roles are circumscribed. In other words, they are flunkies rather than bosses. In a study of organizational hierarchies, Alison Cook and Christy Glass found that minorities tend to occupy a middle or bottom tier within an organization's leadership structure and observed that "[e]ven after controlling for occupation, education, and experience, racial/ethnic minorities are less likely than whites to hold leadership positions in work organizations."[68]

Network stratification and hierarchical ranking based on ethnicity and origin run counter to the ideology of universal brotherhood promoted by the jihadists. The practical realities of organizing for global terrorism, however, are such that social control matters more than ideology. Americans are, with few exceptions, grunts in the organization. They carry out violent attacks, died, or otherwise do lowly ranked tasks that keep the terrorist organization moving forward—like Bruce Hoffman's proverbial shark—but end up in prison or dead.

Regression analysis is a modeling technique that allows the researcher to isolate the causal effect between two or more variables. Here, we wanted to find out how significant some of the demographic factors really are for the type of activities in which Americans become involved on behalf of the jihadist foreign terrorist groups. A key assumption in discussions of "homegrown" terrorism is that young Muslims are driven to violence by anger over their circumstances. If that were true, we would assume that they above all would choose to attack symbols of their anger here, at home, in the United States. As it turns out, that assumption is incorrect. They most of all want to travel. Going abroad with the intention of becoming a foreign fighter was the most popular choice of action.

Close to half of the individuals became foreign fighters or attempted to join a terrorist organization abroad. This underscores how important the aspiration to travel and become a *mujahideen* is to Western adherents. Evidently, what drives them above all is not anger against their circumstances at home but rather an adventure-seeking urge to fight abroad in the name of *jihad*.

Four action types—here called roles—were treated as dependent in a regression analysis. The demographic variables (convert, native-origin natural-born Muslim, and immigrant-origin Muslim) were used as the independent variables. Because all variables are categorical variables, binary logistic regression tests were used to estimate the odds for the different groups to undertake each of the four types of engagement.

Of these dependent variables ("roles"), the first are nonviolent supporters. This action type includes fundraising, recruiting, and proselytizing

efforts related to terrorism that were not protected under the United States' generous First Amendment rights to advocate for extremist politics. The other action types were attempts to commit domestic violent attacks or committing such acts; attempts to go abroad to fight for a foreign terrorist organization; and finally, carrying out a domestic act of terrorism as well as attempting to join (and, in some cases, successfully joining) a foreign terrorist organization.

The analysis made use of a type of correlation analysis called binary logistic regression, which is used when the independent variable is highly correlated. Here, the independent variables are classified as "is" or "isn't." The output metric is an odds ratio, which represents the constant effect of the independent variable on the outcome. These estimate the rate at which a particular demographic group engaged in a particular type of action as compared to people who did not belong to that group. In other words, converts are compared with non-converts with respect to the likelihood that they assume X role. Likewise, if the people in a particular subgroup had an odds ratio of 1.5:1 of engaging in a particular activity X, they chose to do X at a 50% higher rate than people who are not in that group. If the odds were 1:1, the particular group was no more likely than the comparison group

Table 9.3. Binary logistic regression for American Jihadists, grouped by action type, 1990–2019 (I)

Variable	Nonviolent only (Fundraising, recruitment, preaching)	Violent domestic plots (No foreign fighting)	Foreign fighting (No violent domestic plots)	Both violent domestic plots and foreign fighting
Male	0.28 (0.09)[c]	1.90 (0.64)[a]	0.93 (0.30)	6.40 (6.60)
Native	0.62 (0.15)[a]	0.60 (0.12)[b]	1.70 (0.34)[b]	1.80 (0.57)
Convert to Islam	0.40 (0.11)[c]	3.00 (0.56)[c]	0.61 (0.12)[b]	0.80 (0.23)
Age	1.10 (0.01)[c]	1.00 (0.01)	0.94 (0.01)[c]	0.96 (0.02)[a]
Constant	0.11 (0.05)[c]	0.25 (0.12)[b]	2.80 (1.40)[a]	0.04 (0.04)[b]
Pseudo R^2	0.16	0.05	0.07	0.04

N = 724; 29 missing

Key: *a* = p<0.05, *b* = p<0.01, *c* = p<0.001

Reporting odds ratios and significance, with standard error in parentheses. The constant indicates the baseline odds. Pseudo R^2 measures the total variability of the dependent variable in the equation around the mean. The lower the value, the better the fit.

to do X. (Odds ratios are different from probability. If the odds ratio is 2:1 the probability of this outcome is 1/3.) The results are shown in Table 9.3.

Converts were nearly three times as likely (2.7:1) to become foreign fighters as non-converts. Men are six times (6.0:1) more likely to commit violent offenses—both domestic and abroad—than are women. The same applies to the variable homegrown natural-born Muslim.

Some of the other effects of demography on role types were more limited, although still solid. Homegrown offenders were nearly twice as likely (1:7:1) to become foreign fighters as were immigrant offenders. The older people get, the less likely they are to commit violent offenses (although the effect was relatively weak).

Age had a highly significant but moderate effect on the likelihood of becoming a foreign fighter. The odds ratio is 0.9:1. This would suggest that as the militants age, they are less likely to become foreign fighters. Meanwhile, we found a highly significant relationship between being a convert and becoming a foreign fighter. It is not possible to determine if self-selection is the cause or if the foreign terrorist groups are unwilling to take on older militants as would-be fighters.

It is plausible that older folks might be averse to violent roles, but the relationship between age and the propensity for violent acts is fuzzy. There was no significant relationship between age and becoming a violent domestic operative. Older militants may carry out domestic attacks but are less likely to become foreign fighters. Moreover, immigrants are nearly twice as likely to become violent domestic operatives (the relationship was highly statistically significant). Another possibility (discussed in what follows) is that the immigrants in the dataset arrive with the intent of becoming recruiters or proselytizers for the global *jihad*. In fact, an immigrant has higher odds of becoming a nonviolent domestic operative, with a ratio of 1.4:1 (highly significant).

Women are most likely to assume one of two roles: providing nonviolent support activities (raising money, buying tickets for people, posting threats online) and going abroad to join the struggle. They generally showed little inclination to carry out domestic attacks. The results are shown in Table 9.4.

That men are more violent than women is not a surprise. What may be surprising is the disinclination of natural-born Muslims to participate in domestic attacks (0.37:1). Conversely, immigrants are disinclined to become foreign fighters (0.6:1).

Table 9.4. Binary logistic regression for American Jihadists, grouped by action type, 1990–2019 (II)

Variable	Nonviolent only (Fundraising, recruitment, preaching)	Violent domestic plots (No foreign fighting)	Foreign fighting (No violent domestic plots)	Both violent domestic plots and foreign fighting
Female	3.60 (1.20)[c]	0.52 (0.17)[a]	1.10 (0.34)	0.16 (0.16)
Immigrant	1.60 (0.38)[a]	1.70 (0.32)[b]	0.58 (0.12)[b]	0.56 (0.18)
Natural-Born Muslim	2.50 (0.69)[c]	0.34 (0.06)[c]	1.60 (0.32)[b]	1.25 (0.36)
Age	1.10 (0.01)[c]	1.00 (0.01)	0.94 (0.01)[c]	0.96 (0.02)[a]
Constant	0.01 (0.00)[c]	0.87 (0.26)	2.70 (0.97)[b]	0.35 (0.18)[a]
Pseudo R^2	0.16	0.05	0.07	0.04

N = 724; 29 missing

Key: *a* = p<0.05, *b* = p<0.01, *c* = p<0.001

Reporting odds ratios and significance, with standard error in parentheses. The constant indicates the baseline odds. Pseudo R^2 measures the total variability of the dependent variable in the equation around the mean. The lower the value, the better the fit.

These findings run counter to common assumptions about why people are drawn into violent extremism, which generally have stressed the importance of anger against discrimination and against Western ways of life as motivating the religious militants. Not only are they rarely religious until they embrace the jihadist belief system, militants are also primarily motivated to go abroad to fight rather than taking their anger out on their home surroundings. Those types of sentiments are often expressed as justifications when they do "something," but they are framing their complaints following ideological scripts rather than giving authentic accounts of their passage to militancy.[69]

What then are their basic motivations? Ultimately, nascent individual psychological motives are unknowable. We can only infer behavioral changes from the contexts provided by the data. Young homegrown Muslims and converts to Islam may want to travel to jihadi hotspots because they are excited by the vision and opportunities promised by the recruiters to become part of a movement or, simply, in order to be a big man with a gun. Immigrants, on the other hand, are more focused on homeland activities; raising money, recruiting, etc. They are also more likely to undertake a violent

attack in the United States. This may be because they were already inclined to anger against the United States when they came, or because—like Aafia Siddique—they radicalized while living in the United States under the influence of recruiters and preachers.

Why do they do it?

Violent extremism is a marginal, low-base number phenomenon. In probability and statistics, the term "base rate" refers to the population probabilities of exhibiting a certain class or category. If a particular class or a category of activities or pathologies is rarely observed in the general population, the ability to study—or treat—the phenomenon using traditional methods is impaired. Terrorist jihadist extremism falls into this category of rare and complex phenomena. A fuzzy estimate is that fewer than 0.02% of American Muslims have participated in terrorist activities between 2001 and 2019. The estimate is based on an assumption of three and a half million Muslims living in the United States.[70] Even that estimate is too high because no adjustment was made for the converts, who comprise between 25% and 30% of the Americans who have committed terrorist crimes inspired by Al Qaeda and its aligned groups. Converts generally adopt Islam simultaneously with embracing terrorist extremism.

Rather than search for a profile of extremism—a futile endeavor—research is now focused on explaining how people come to embrace terrorist extremism. The basic idea is that radicalization occurs through a process of deepening engagements that can be observed in changing overt behaviors. Psychologists tend to take the long view. Priming a normal person to accept a moral and personal imperative of self-sacrifice takes time.[71]

Suggestive metaphors have been used to describe the radicalization process. John Horgan argues we should think of "pathways" to extremism, implying that multiple roads may lead to the same climactic endpoint.[72] Fathali Moghaddam invoked the image of a "staircase to terrorism" and envisioned five distinct steps up to the top.[73] Others have compared radicalization to a "funnel." In what has become known as the NYPD model, Silber and Bhatt identify four phases of increased ideological commitment: "Pre-radicalization," "Self-identification," "Indoctrination," and "Jihadization."[74]

As part of multi-year research project, I worked with my students to develop a list of behavioral indicators that could track behavioral changes

associated with growing radicalization which led to criminal terrorism-related acts.[75] Instead of trying to profile and identify at-risk populations, the study attempted to generate a dynamic, evidence-based assessment model of radicalization trajectories of homegrown militants inspired by the jihadist ideology.[76] Using sources drawn from prosecutions and statements made by the subjects themselves, and by witnesses who knew them well, we were able to develop detailed forensic biographies of 135 Americans. The results of the research have been published elsewhere and only the key findings are discussed here.[77]

We started from the assumption that it will usually take time for a person to become a violent extremist. This is a process that involves a transformation of the self. It will be reflected in changes of behavior and by disruptive acts that are noticed, even if misinterpreted, by others. To the extent that a common pattern emerges, it is possible to track changes in behavior that indicate a passage from the initial stage of cognitive opening to the embrace of extremist beliefs and then on to the final stage of "doing something." It should even be possible to place probabilistic timestamps on those behaviors. To be clear, the dependent variable for the study was not the reason people come to hold extremist ideas, but rather the *sequence* through which most individuals progress from holding such beliefs to perpetrating a violent act or to supporting others committing violent acts.

Indicators of behaviors considered to be associated with the Salafi-jihadist belief system were identified and specific cues were specified for inferring such behaviors. The end point is clearly demarcated as the moment at which an individual commits a criminal offense or is arrested on charges that lead to conviction. It is much harder to pinpoint the onset of radicalization. And without a known starting point, it is not possible to establish the time frame for the typical radicalization process. A solution is to estimate radicalization trajectories by working backwards from the time of action. By defining the moment when an individual is arrested or "does something" as the "zero hour," it may be possible, given sufficient biographical evidence, retroactively to trace signature behaviors indicative of an increasing commitment to extremism.

The methodology is a variant on process tracing, which is used in the study of social movement mobilization to assess sequential causal mechanisms from qualitative source material.[78] Following the codebook, the researchers combed through the primary material and entered into a spreadsheet the first date at which a particular cue indicative of increasing militancy

was noted. The timelines for the individuals' radicalization process were then charted. By correlating the timeline data with other biographical information, e.g., age, gender, and whether a particular individual grew up Muslim or converted to Islam before or during the radicalization process, profiles of the typical radicalization trajectory were constructed for different cohorts.

Information about key dates, such as when an offender first started to change his or her way of dress or attempted to travel abroad to join a terrorist organization or came to the attention of law enforcement, was generally discovered without much difficulty. Other indicators, such as evidence of personal trauma, or when and why an individual dropped out of school, were often not available in documents deriving from prosecution and adjudication and required more research.

We were able to assess with reasonable accuracy the age at which offenders were radicalized by subtracting the year of birth from the year of the first indication of behaviors consistent with militancy. The bulk of homegrown offenders first exhibited signs of extremism between the ages of nineteen and twenty-nine. The median age at radicalization was twenty-two but a third of the group were over the age of thirty when they initially were drawn into extremism. To repeat, contrary to popular assumption, Jihadism is not generally a youth phenomenon.

After 2010 a noticeable uptick was, however, seen in the number of teenagers who became involved with terrorism-related crimes. Sometimes, but not always, online social media prompted the process. More often social media fueled co-dependent radicalization of a peer group or close relatives. An example of facilitated networked—and co-dependent—radicalization involved three siblings from Chicago. In December 2014, two brothers, nineteen and sixteen years old, and their seventeen-year-old sister were caught attempting to fly to Istanbul, hoping to go on to fight in Syria.[79] They had been recruited by a twenty-two-year-old British foreign fighter based in Syria known as "Abu Qa'qa," who initially was contacted by the young men's sister via Twitter. "Abu Qa'qa" was an alias for Raphael Hostey, who left Manchester in 2013 together with a group of friends and joined ISIS.[80] Using Twitter, he was heavily involved in recruiting other Western youth to the Islamic State. He was killed in May 2016.

How long does it take for an individual to become a terrorist? Opinions on the time frame for radicalization can vary significantly. While psychologists

tend to think it takes years to prime an individual for violence, law enforcement agents and social workers involved with extremists often emphasize that the window for intervention is narrow, sometimes very narrow.[81] An FBI official (who spoke off the record) asserted that the opportunity for intervention is "a matter of days, not weeks." Abdurrahman Anderson, a British charity worker with whom I spoke, and who has work with terrorist offenders, concurred. He pointed out that, in his experience, certain individuals could radicalize quickly from "stage A, B, and straight to Z."

Our research showed, however, that radicalization generally unfolds over the course of several years. The median period was fifty months, or just over four years. All the same, it is difficult to speak of a "typical" length of time for radicalization. A few individuals take longer to reach the point of action. Removing the 10% who took the longest—sometimes a decade—reduced the typical trajectory to three years. Recently, however, the trajectory has contracted significantly. Of the many native jihadists inspired by ISIS, most were radicalized in less than five years, often in less than two years. Many youths, particularly young women and teenagers of any gender who grew up in Muslim households, made the transition in a matter of months.

These variations greatly complicate efforts to paint a general picture. Because of the distortion caused by a handful of very long-germinating jihadists, the individuals who fell into the upper ~10% on the distribution and were extreme outliers with very lengthy and highly atypical radicalization trajectories were removed from the calculation.

The upper 25% of the frequency distribution took more than seven years to arrive at the culmination of their radicalization in arrest or death. It was characteristic of these individuals that they spent a great deal of time searching for opportunities to realize the ambition of becoming a *mujahideen*. An example is Elton Simpson, one of the two men who attempted to attack an exhibit featuring cartoon images of Muhammad in Garland, Texas on May 3, 2015. Reconstructing his biography, we discovered that Simpson had been radicalized close to a decade before making the decision to undertake a concrete terrorist act. However, he had been arrested and released on probation five years earlier in connection with an attempt to join *al-Shabaab* in Somalia. At the other end of the spectrum, the lower quartile, the study subjects typically took one to two years to complete the arc of radicalization.

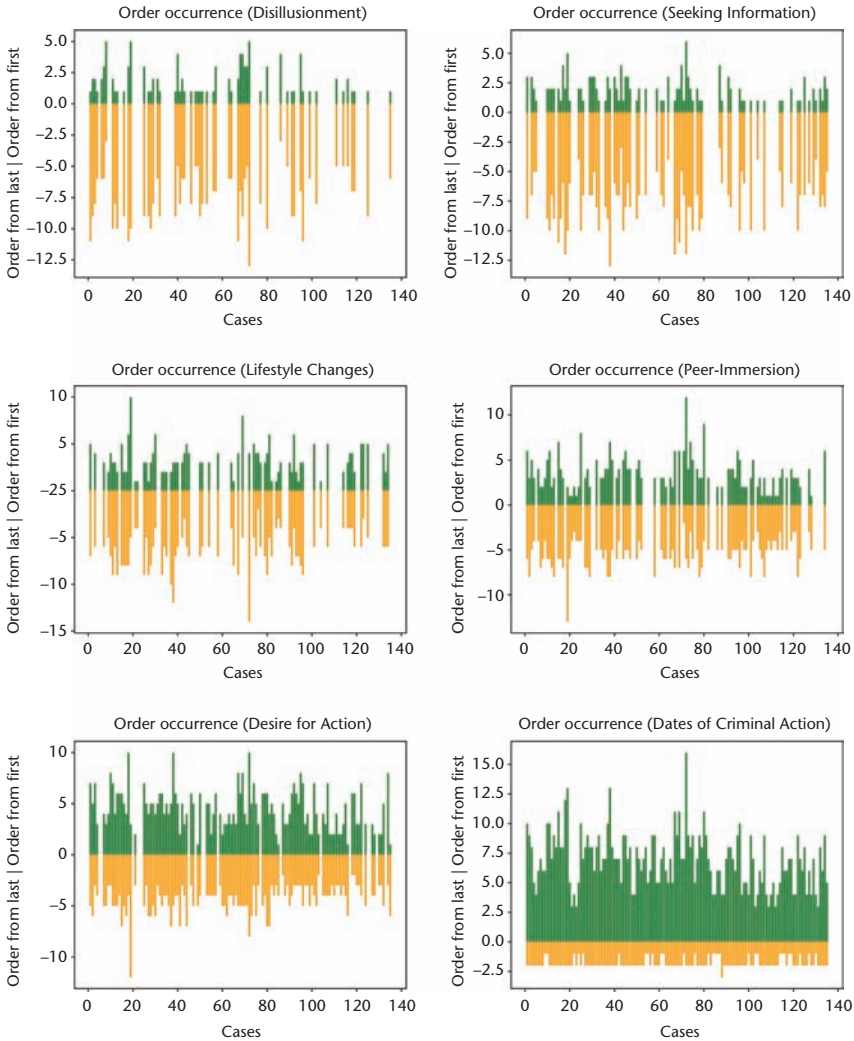

Figure 9.2. Order occurrence of time stamped indicators of ideologically motivated behavioral changes of American jihadist terrorism-offenders. (N = 135). Created by Shashika Muramudalige

Note: The graphics require a little explanation but are easily interpreted intuitively. Each bar in the graphic corresponds to a person included in the study. The six graphs correspond to a different behavioral indicator of growing extremism drawn from the twenty-four variables used in the study to track behaviors. Here, six of the behavioral indicator variables are shown. The "0 hour" is the date when an indicator related to a specific variable first occurred. Green above 0 reflects instances of behavioral changes or expressions of extremism observed prior to the variable charted. Orange at and below 0 indicates the first instances of the particular variable and subsequent expressions. Gaps in the bar grid indicate that a specific variable was not observed in the case of the particular individual.

The research was funded by awards from the National Institute of Justice, a research arm of the Office of Justice Programs in the U.S. Department of Justice (Award #2013-ZA-BX-0005 and Award #2017-ZA-CX-0002).

Women typically radicalize faster than men. Converts are slower to take action than are individuals who grew up as Muslims.

A visualization of the timelines for individual radicalization trajectories can be found in Figure 9.2. The graphic summarizes the results of the 135 forensic biographies of American jihadist terrorism offenders that I developed in collaboration with my students. Twenty-four different variables were used to track behavioral changes associated with extremist radicalization. Multiple indicators of the behavior patterns associated with each variable were developed and the date when the shift was first noted in the public record was coded. Once the timelines were standardized a clear picture of the sequencing of the behaviors emerged. End points were represented by the date at which the subjects were arrested, died, or left the United States permanently to join an insurgency abroad. It should be emphasized that while many of these behaviors—but not all—were innocuous when seen in isolation, it was the dynamic and sequence of progressive engagement that was characteristic.

It turned out not only that the variables worked well to capture the identity changes that the individuals underwent as they molded themselves to the scripts of the ideology. The changes also generally occurred in relatively predictable sequences. The graphic in Figure 9.2. shows a visual comparison of the order sequence of six variables drawn from the twenty-four variables used to track behavioral changes in the radicalization process of the offenders we studied.[82] "Zero hour" represents that date when a specific behavioral change first occurred in the life course biographies that we developed for each of the 135 terrorism offenders. The color change in the graphs indicates past and future behaviors. As is clear from the depiction, the offenders proceeded with a surprising degree of uniformity through the various steps in the radicalization process tracked by behavioral changes or expressions of growing extremism.

An early symptom was the expression of disillusionment, and an indication that an individual was looking for a place in the world or was unhappy with their current life. This led to a search for new authority figures and in some cases to the pursuit of information about jihadist extremism. This type of cognitive opening can produce life-changing decisions.[83]

Lifestyle changes were prevalent in the next stage of the radicalization process. Learning how to become part of the extremist movement required a transformation in the individual's identity, apparent in outward lifestyle changes. The radicalizing individual begins to adhere more strongly to the

strictures of their newfound ideology, incorporating new expressions of piety such as wearing traditional clothing, growing a beard, or abstaining from alcohol and other substances deemed *haram*. These follow an ideologically motivated script. Occasionally, the changes associated with lifestyle adaption are startling to friends and family. Bystanders, including teachers, employers and prison officers pick up these new identity markers, but often do not know what they mean.

An insistence on mixing only with other like-minded people is an exceptionally salient indicator of growing extremism. Seeking out and spending time with like-minded extremists can be regarded as a prerequisite for motivating progression to undertaking criminal action. This can be observed in many other social contexts that involve social contagion mechanisms. Cults, gangs, and even high school cliques are examples. Of the 135 subjects examined, my coders were able to approximate the presence and time frame of immersive behavior in the vast majority of cases and could often fix the time frame with a high degree of certainty and precision. Such an immersive engagement with extremist peers nearly always preceded the expression of a desire for action. The peers could be found online, in which case the participants often tried to meet up in person. Friends, brothers and sisters, and cousins, when they joined together, moved in lockstep from one stage to the next.

This is the point where the United States and Europe begin to look very different. In the United States, access to street-side or brick-and-mortar extremist proselytizing centers has been limited since the 1990s. The online world is therefore more salient. Sometimes, the peers were located in another state and sometimes an ocean away, perhaps in London or in Raqqa, the capital city of the Islamic State's pseudo-caliphate.

Notes

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3. A 9/11 Commission staff report published in 2004 highlighted the risk posed by lax and inefficient border controls to the United States' domestic security. Eldridge et al., "9/11 and Terrorist Travel: Staff Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States," 49.
4. Mueller and Stewart, "The Terrorism Delusion: America's Overwrought Response to September 11."

5. CNN, "'Dirty Bomb' Suspect's Criminal Record."
6. Investigative Project on Terrorism, "Mujahideen Data Form: Jose Padilla."
7. U.S. Department of Justice, United States of America v. Adham Amin Hassoun.
8. U.S. Department of Justice, United States of America v. Jose Padilla.
9. CNN, "Transcript of News Conference on Jose Padilla."
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12. Serna and Grad, "Adam Gadahn: Al Qaeda Terrorist, California Native and Grandson of a Jew."
13. U.S. Department of Justice, "Indictment Unsealed Charging Former San Diego Resident Jehad Serwan Mostafa with Providing Material Support to Militant Islamic Terrorist Organization Al-Shabaab."
14. The video is no longer available. An anti-Shabaab Somali news outlet carried a story about the event that is still available online; https://somaliwarmonitor.wordpress.com/2011/10/14/al-qaeda-in-somalia-donates-food-aid-in-al-shabaab-run-idp-camp/
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18. U.S. Department of Justice, United States v. Masoud Kahn. Memorandum opinion. at 21.
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22. Berger, *Jihad Joe,* 51.
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25. McCoy, "Fourteen Years Ago, He Was a Convicted Jihadist. Now He's Fighting Radical Islam Steps from the White House"; Weiner, "Thanks to Supreme Court, Convicted Member of Jihadi 'Paintball' Group Leaving Prison Decades Early."
26. Most of what is known about the Queens group in the early days comes from a British documentary filmmaker, Richard Watson, who also wrote an essay about his findings that was published by GRANTA in 2008. The BBC documentary can be watched in fragments on YouTube. Watson, *The Rise of the British Jihad*.
27. CNN, "Supergrass Tells of Terror Fight."
28. *Manchester Evening News*, "Main Goal – the Islamic Revolution in Pakistan."
29. Eggen, "Pakistani American Aiding London Probe."
30. U.S. Department of Justice, United States of America v. Dhiren Barot.
31. In 2004, Khan moved with his parents to North Carolina where he lived until he moved to Yemen in 2009.

32. National Public Radio's Minneapolis-based station produced excellent in-depth coverage of the youth's families and the trails. The broadcasts are still available online; see https://www.npr.org/series/102787287/the-somali-minneapolis-terrorist-axis
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10

The Boston Marathon Bombers

On April 15, 2013, at 2:49 p.m., as throngs of runners approached the finish line of the Boston Marathon, two bombs exploded. Three people were killed and 264 injured. Seventeen of them lost arms or legs, in some cases both legs.[1] The bombs were packed with ball bearings and made as deadly as they could be. If not for the presence of a large number of medical volunteers for the Marathon and the closeness of some of the worlds' best hospitals, many more people would have died.[2]

Boston is sports crazy, and the Marathon is a cherished event. It is the world's oldest marathon and has been an annual event since 1897. In 2013, it brought together 30,000 amateur and professional runners, and half a million spectators. The Marathon is always held on Patriot's Day, a holiday that commemorates the uprising against the British and which is celebrated only in Massachusetts. Patriot's Day falls on the third Monday in April, so it coincides with the first signs of New England's notoriously late spring. The Marathon is a huge street party. Residents come out to cheer the runners along the route. Many people have family members running or know someone who is running.

The bombers were two brothers, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, Chechen Muslims from the Russian Federation who had come to the United States with their parents who claimed to be refugees. The family were not observant Muslims, and the brothers were drug dealers and users.

The two men carried their bombs to downtown Boston in their backpacks. Dzhokhar was nineteen years old. Tamerlan was twenty-six. They lived across the Charles River from the Marathon finish line, in Cambridge, on Norfolk Street, right between Harvard University and The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The younger brother was in his first year of

study at one of the campuses of University of Massachusetts. This chapter will consider their life-stories, motivations, and backgrounds in context.

The brothers walked away unscathed after setting off their bombs and returned home. A five-day manhunt followed the bombings before they were identified, and found. The hunt for the brothers ended in a shootout with the police during which Tamerlan was killed. Dzhokhar was found a day later, hiding in a boat parked in a resident's driveway, wounded but alive.

It was all so close. The brothers and their family lived less than a mile from where I live. They went to Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, a highly rated public high school in Cambridge. The ordinariness of the attackers themselves contributed to the emotional shock of their acts. The eldest brother had traveled to Chechnya and sought sponsorship or perhaps to join the *jihad* there. He was not successful. Nevertheless, as this chapter will show, they were not without supporters and facilitators.

Do-it-yourself terrorism

Homegrown terrorist plots became increasingly common after Anwar al-Awlaki and Samir Khan, his assistant from Queens, New York revolutionized Al Qaeda's media strategy in 2008. They took the message onto YouTube and Facebook and spearheaded a migration onto social media platforms. They reenergized Al Qaeda's recruitment publicity for Western audiences and recast Bin Laden's message in snappy English-language memes. The shift to social media recruitment and inspirational leadership dramatically expanded the potential for Do-It-Yourself (DIY) terrorist plots and lowered the bar for recruitment to violent extremism, drawing an increasing number of Americans into the plotting of violent attacks on U.S. soil. The flagship publication in Awlaki's digital ministry was *Inspire* magazine, a glossy online magazine published in English by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Inspire magazine was (and still is) an online publication in the form of an e-zine. When it was launched, it was similar in form to *Jihad Recollections*, an online magazine set up by Khan in 2009 from his home in Queens, New York, which ran for four issues. *Inspire* mixed self-help advice on how to conduct a violent attack, with Q and As about issues of concern to anyone ready to embrace violent *Jihad*, inspirational biographies of jihadist heroes, and essays by Awlaki on *jihad*. The Do-It-Yourself online learning program

proved a successful gimmick for recruitment but not nearly as successful as a tool for bringing violent conspiracies to a successful conclusion. Driving a truck was doable for the recruits but making a bomb following a recipe proved a challenge. Access to real-life logistical training is critical to a network's ability to stage a bombing attack. Americans who make contact and receive training abroad remain the most likely to stage mass casualty attacks using IEDs. Notorious examples are the 2009 New York Subway plotters and Faisal Shahzad's failed attempt to set off a car bomb in Times Square in 2010. In both cases, hands-on instructions were provided in a camp in Pakistan.

The brother's bombs were made of pressure cookers and closely mirrored instructions from an issue of Anwar al-Awlaki's *Inspire* magazine that carried instructions on "how to make a bomb in your mother's kitchen." The older Tsarnaev had some experience as a car mechanic, which might have been helpful. Nevertheless, questions linger about exactly how they managed to build their devices. The brothers have often been portrayed as an example of "lone wolves," terrorists who self-radicalize online and learn online how to carry out a deadly attack. That too turns out to be a mischaracterization. Indeed, the brothers illustrate how flawed the "lone wolf" concept is.[3] Their path to detonating their homemade bombs at the goal line of the Marathon may more accurately be described as a family project.

Boston in lockdown

The CCTV footage showed the Tsarnaevs to have been strikingly cool. Ironically, it was precisely because they were so unaffected that their demeanor helped the investigators zero in on them among the panicked crowds in the footage. Back in Cambridge, Dzhokhar went to buy milk in a nearby Whole Foods store while his brother waited in the car.[4] That evening, the brothers went out to dinner at a café with one of Tamerlan's friends. Dzhokhar later returned to his dorm room on the Dartmouth campus of the University of Massachusetts, a state college where he started to study in September 2012. There, he hung out with friends and tweeted obscure messages about his state of mind that at the time seemed like self-absorbed prattle of a nineteen-year-old.

Three days after the bombing, on April 18, the FBI released CCTV pictures of the brothers, partly in the hope that this would prevent a lynching.[5] A victim, Jeff Bauman, who had lost both his legs, made the initial

identification from the footage after he got out of surgery.[6] Reddit.com, a social media site, had sent out a call to "crowd source" the investigation that set off vigilantes undertaking to identify the perpetrators. After two innocent students were publicly misidentified on social media as the culprits and the story was picked up by broadcasters, the police decided to release the photos from the CCTV footage. (The misidentification had tragic consequences. One of the young men mistakenly identified by the media later killed himself.[7])

The brothers were known at that point only as "White Hat" and "Black Hat," named after the baseball caps they were wearing. After the photos were released, they went on the run. That night they shot and killed the MIT campus police officer, Sean A. Collier. They wanted Collier's gun but it was locked into a safety holster and they could not get it off his body. The brothers had only one weapon, an old illegal handgun that they had borrowed from a friend in 2012 and not returned.[8] But, importantly, they did have on hand more of the homemade shrapnel-filled pressure cooker bombs they had used at the finish line at the Marathon.

They also wanted money and a nice car. After killing Collier, they hijacked a Mercedes-Benz SUV, taking the driver hostage. Then they drove around town picking up things and forced the owner to use his card to take out money from an ATM. They then ordered him to go to a gas station to refuel the car. But at the gas station the driver ran for his life and managed to escape to another gas station directly across the street. From here, he called the police. He had critically important information: the brothers had divulged that they were going to New York City and wanted to set off bombs in Times Square.

They made a mistake when they chose to hijack an expensive SUV. The car was equipped with a location device and was therefore quickly traced to Watertown, a city neighboring Cambridge. Twenty minutes after the driver called the police, an officer called in to say he had located the SUV at a mall. He started trailing the SUV waiting for backup, but the brothers got out of the car, shot at the officer's car, and threw one of their homemade pressure cooker bombs at him. The brothers escaped. Shortly after midnight on April 19, three and a half days after the bombing, and after a wide-ranging investigation and intense public involvement, the two men were tracked down. A street-side firefight broke out. Tamerlan was wounded. He got out of the car and began to wrestle one of the officers to the ground. Why he did this we cannot know but it is probable that he had decided to invite the officers

to shoot him so that he would die in a gun fight and become a martyr, which would guarantee him the highest rewards in paradise. The police did not oblige. Officers subdued and handcuffed him.

At that point, back in the car, Dzhokhar put the SUV in gear and drove over his brother, wounding him mortally. Dzhokhar then fled in the car. According to the stunned officers, he had intentionally run over his brother. Tamerlan died in an ambulance on the way to the hospital.

The shootout at the mall was chaotic. An inter-agency investigative report commissioned by the state of Massachusetts estimated that over 200 shots were fired, of which just ten bullets came from the gun used by the brothers.[9] Forensic evidence showed that the officers wounded in the shootout were victims of "friendly fire," hit by their colleagues.

For another eighteen hours, the search went on for Dzhokhar. A state of emergency was declared in Boston and the surrounding towns of Newton, Waltham, Belmont, Cambridge, and Watertown. The mayors and the governor issued a "shelter-in-place" request telling people not to leave their house or workplace, and to remain where they were. Public transportation was halted. The many campuses in the area were shut down and students told to stay in their dorms. There are about thirty-five universities and colleges in the area, each with its own police force. Police staged a house-to-house search in Watertown. Officers from across Massachusetts rushed to the scene. Around 19,000 National Guard troops were brought in and rode around the neighborhood streets in armored vehicles.

By the end of the day, Dzhokhar had still not been found and the search was called off. Residents ventured out again. Shortly afterwards, a homeowner called the police to say he thought that someone was hiding in a boat that was parked in his driveway. (Odd as it may sound, New Englanders often park their boats in their driveways during the winter.) Heat-sensitive imaging identified the person in the boat as Dzhokhar. What happened next is described in shocking detail in a report that was later produced by the City of Boston and various state agencies.[10]

After overhearing radio traffic about the location of the suspect, law enforcement officers from multiple departments self-deployed to the scene. Within moments, more than 100 officers had gathered in front of and behind the home with the boat. One of the responding officers, on his own initiative, fired his weapon in response to a perceived movement in the boat. Assuming that the shot came from the terrorist, the crowd of

heavily armed officers opened fire. Seconds passed before a senior officer ordered a ceasefire.

Dzhokhar survived this second storm of bullets and was taken to hospital. There he told the FBI that he and his brother had manufactured the IEDs at home, using pressure cookers and steel ball bearings. He also confessed that he used a disposable cell phone to call his brother to synchronize the detonations, and claimed that that no one else had been involved in the plot.[11] Dzhokhar has stuck to this story ever since.

The prosecution

Many months later, Dzhokhar's trial started in the federal courthouse in Boston. On April 18, 2015, exactly two years after the shootout at the Watertown Mall, he was found guilty on all counts.[12] A few months later, in June, he was sentenced to death by a jury.[13] An appeals court overturned the death sentence in July 2020 on the grounds that the judge at the sentencing hearing had failed to screen the jurors sufficiently and erred in disallowing evidence that could have supported the defense lawyers' argument that his violent older brother coerced Dzhokhar.[14] (The jury foreman was found later to have posted derogatory remarks about Dzhokhar on social media.)

Conviction and sentencing are separate judicial processes in the United States. Federal law allows for the use of the death penalty but Massachusetts state law does not. For years, criminal justice reformers and Catholics in the state have worked together to prevent the use of the death penalty. Local sentiment strongly favored life imprisonment, and a statement from some of the victims urged the prosecutor to ask for life imprisonment and refrain from requesting the death penalty. But this was a federal prosecution, and the Boston-based federal prosecutor, U.S. Attorney Carmen Ortiz, asked for the death penalty—and won.

The disagreement between state and federal law on the use of the death penalty complicates jury selection in a case where the death penalty may be demanded. Jurors called for duty in such cases are required to sign a statement to say that they are willing to apply the penalty. The rule effectively disqualifies people who have ethical objections to the use of the death penalty from serving on such cases and creates a bias in the jury selection process that favors pro-death penalty jurors.[15]

All of Boston watched the trial closely. Many of the victims were in attendance. Teachers and parents from Cambridge Rindge and Latin pleaded on Dzhokhar's behalf. But Boston soon returned to normal. The Marathon the following year—and every following year until the cancellation in 2020 due to the coronavirus epidemic—went off without a hitch with record-high attendance and interminable traffic jams created by roadblocks. Runners who had lost their legs in the bombing ran the Marathon again. The "Boston Strong" charity raised eighty million dollars for the victims.[16] T-shirts with the "Boston Strong" imprint became cherished souvenirs. A movie with Hollywood actors with Boston credentials—the Boston accent is notoriously difficult to copy—received enthusiastic reviews everywhere but in Boston where the critics found the movie to lack realism.

The appeals court decision did not affect the guilty verdict. The government appealed the case and it is now pending before the U.S. Supreme Court. If Dzhokhar is ever executed, he will be the first domestic terrorist to be executed since Timothy McVeigh was executed in June 2001 by lethal injection. McVeigh, a far-right extremist, was responsible for the 1995 truck bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City in which 168 people were killed and seven hundred injured.

Why did they do it?

The first question is always why did they do it? It seemed an unfathomable crime. But tracking the brothers' slide into extremism can be done easily enough from documents released during the trial by the defense and prosecution teams. Journalists and bloggers have produced other versions of the drama, often featuring elaborate conspiracy theories.

An example is Masha Gessen's well-reviewed book on them. Gessen's account is worth reading until she goes down the rabbit hole of conspiracy theory and pins the blame for the Marathon bombings on the FBI and the U.S. government. She thinks the FBI killed Tamerlan to cover up the fact that he was an informant for the government.[17] This she deduces from the premise that it cannot be true that the FBI did not know the identity of the brothers and did not know where to find them. According to Gessen, the FBI recruited Tamerlan as an informant in 2011, and U.S. government agents taught him how to make bombs.[18] Therefore, the FBI had to make

sure he died. She conjures up a great conspiracy rather than allowing for unhappy but understandable errors and investigative shortcomings.

It is nevertheless fair to ask why the FBI released photos of the brothers before the agency knew their names. It goes against protocol, for good reasons. But the government does not know everything, and the photos had not been matched up to names or addresses. It is nevertheless widely assumed that electronic records and facial recognition software should have made it possible for the FBI to quickly run identity checks on the men. Their driving license photos were on file with the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles. Moreover, the FBI had interviewed Tamerlan Tsarnaev and the family in 2011 in response to a tip from the Russian security service, FSB, and so it is reasonable to suppose that the agency would have had their pictures on file. But Tamerlan had a beard at the time of the interview, and the agents did not recognize him with a clean-shaven face in the grainy CCTV footage from businesses near the Marathon's finishing line. The Massachusetts RMV's computer system is notoriously inadequate and proved unable to match the low-resolution CCTV pictures to anything on file.

Gessen is not alone in harboring overimaginative theories. Websites publish stories about hidden FBI agents wearing distinctive shoes and hiding in doorways while they watch the brothers detonate the bombs. There are many fantasy-fueled stories about what "really" happened, but all these conspiracy theories are very similar[19]: the federal government knows everything and controls everything and, therefore, when things go badly, it is because that is what the U.S. authorities really want.

The FBI has unequivocally denied that any effort was made to recruit members of the Tsarnaev family as informants. The investigators did not know the brothers' names until they had been identified with the help of the public after the release of the photos. Among those who helped the police identify the bombers was one of Dzhokhar's teachers who later provided heart-rending testimony about his hopes for the teenager and asked the court to spare him the death penalty.[20]

Many of the friends and teachers who testified in his favor refused to believe that Dzhokhar was responsible. The mental illness of his brother; culture (that of Chechens rather than Bostonians); discrimination (by Bostonians); successive integration failures; and—according to a family member—an evil mother, have all been advanced as reasons why the brothers were driven to terrorism.[21] A team of *Boston Globe* journalists concluded that Tamerlan suffered from undiagnosed schizophrenia and that the

brothers' tragic turn to extremism was rooted in family pathologies, including the deference given to the oldest son in Chechen culture, and an overly doting mother. Ultimately, the journalists concluded, "the motivation for the Tsarnaev brothers' violent acts is more likely rooted in the turbulent collapse of their family and their escalating personal and collective failures than, as federal investigators have suggested, on the other side of the globe."[22]

Many people wanted to find exonerating circumstances for Dzhokhar. I too for a while preferred to see the younger brother as victim of his domineering older brother until my students chastised me for being uncharacteristically softheaded. Some supporters appear to have been so moved by Dzhokhar's good looks that they think he could not possibly have "done it." Others have been unable to square his hipster-like behavior and constant dope smoking with the stereotype of the Islamic religious fanatic turning terrorist. Another line of thinking takes the Tsarnaev brothers to epitomize the evil of online extremism and to represent "Lone Wolf" terrorism—a dangerous but uncoordinated movement of "homegrown" militants who learn to become terrorists from the Internet.[23]

Some court records are still sealed but, unusually, during Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's trial both the government team and the lawyers from the Public Defender Division, who represented Dzhokhar, made many of their exhibits and documents publicly available.[24] In March 2014, the House of Representatives' Homeland Security Committee published the findings from a fact-finding trip to Russia and Dagestan. The delegation included Congressman William (Bill) Keating from the 9th Congressional District of Massachusetts, who is a member of the committee. They met with officials and reported back on what the Russians had known about Tamerlan Tsarnaev's activities. Investigative journalism has filled in other gaps in our knowledge, some of it carried out by Russian journalists. Teams of journalists from *The Boston Globe* provided first-rate investigative reporting. Scott Helman and Jenna Russell, two *Boston Globe* journalists, wrote a book about Tsarnaev family based on reporting done by the paper and also covered the extraordinary circumstances of the four-day hunt for the brothers and the city's recovery.[25]

In fact, however, Dzhokhar told us why they did it: using a pencil he found in the boat where he was found after the second shootout on April 19, he wrote a manifesto on the inside wall of the boat, reproduced below. This was transcribed and pictures of the writing were produced as exhibits

in the trial. References in the transcript to "holes" are to places where text had been erased when bullets penetrated the boat.[26]

Dzhokhar's note was not rehearsed or slickly produced. He wrote his statement while lying wounded and close to death. He was clearly writing from his heart. The note is the more striking because of the lack of scripting in comparison to, say, the suicide videos produced by the 2005 London Underground bombers, which were produced and released by Al Qaeda's high command.

> I'm jealous of my brother who
> ha [hole] ceived the reward of jannutul Firdaus (inshallah)
> before me. I do not mourn because his soul is
> very much alive. God has a plan for each person.
> Mine was to hide in his boat and shed some
> light on our actions I ask Allah to make me a
> shahied (iA) to allow me to return to him and
> be among all the righteous people in the highest levels
> of heaven.
> He who Allah guides no one can misguide
> A [hole] bar!
> I bear witness that there is no God but Allah
> and that Muhammad is his
> messenger [hole] r actions came
> with [hole] a [hole] ssage and that
> is [hole] ha Illalah. The U.S.
> Government is killing our innocent
> civilians but most of you already
> know that. As a M[hole] I can't
> stand to see such evil go unpunished,
> we Muslims are one body, you hurt
> one you hurt us all, well at least that's
> how Muhammad (pbuh) wanted it to be [hole] ever,
> the ummah is beginning to rise/awa [hole]
> has awoken the mujahideen, know you are
> fighting men who look into the barrel of your
> gun and see heaven, now how can you compete
> with that. We are promised victory and we
> will surely get it. Now I don't like killing
> innocent people it is forbidden in Islam
> but due to said [hole] it is allowed.
> All credit goes to [hole].[27]

The message testifies to Dzhokhar's view of himself as a holy warrior. Terrorism is theater and the producers are keen that we get their message.

Here, the program notes come in the form of an improvised suicide statement in which Dzhokhar repeated all the main tenets of the jihadist martyrology with the pidgin Arabic references typically used by untrained English-speaking extremists. The meaning of what Dzhokhar wrote is easily understood. He clearly believed he and his brother would receive a heavenly reward for their martyrdom. The reference to "shahied" is a misspelling of the Arabic word for "martyr," which is usually transliterated as *shahid* or *shaheed*. "As a M[hole]" likely should read "As a *Mujahid* I can't…etc." *Mujahid* is the singular of *mujahideen*, the Arabic term for individuals engaging in a religious war. "*Pbuh*" is an abbreviation for "peace be upon him," a reverential appellation used by believers after mentioning the Prophet's name.

Readers unfamiliar with jihadist rhetoric may, however, overlook the importance of the reference to the suspended prohibition on the killing of "innocent people." A bullet hole in the wall of the boat erased the word that Tsarnaev wrote there, but it is safe to infer that it was a reference to the "evil" perpetrated by the "you" in his message—the United States and everybody, Muslim or not-Muslim, who has not yet picked up arms and joined the armed struggle.

Dzhokhar's message was clear. There are no "innocent" people. All Westerners are responsible for violating God's law and the war against Islam. His statement about not "liking" to kill innocent people and then, inserting a "but" like a brake on his argument, affirming that "it is allowed" is a reference to the Manichean jihadist dogma that all Westerners—including all Muslims living in the West who have not joined their side—are complicit in the attack on the Muslim *ummah* until they join the fight. The terrorist is not the aggressor but the avenger for Western transgressions against Islam and the righteous believers. This was the program of martyrdom. It was also right out of Anwar al-Awlaki's DIY playbook.

Family as a radicalizing agent

In the search for answers as to why the brothers *really* did it, the focus has been on the deeply troubled Tsarnaev family. The parents, Anzor and Zubaidat, with eight-year-old Dzhokhar in tow, arrived in Boston in 2002. They had traveled on tourist visas but immediately applied for political asylum on the grounds that they suffered persecution in Russia. Friends and acquaintances in Russia later told journalists that the claim of political

persecution was fabricated. The Tsarnaev parents had never been overtly political, nor had they suffered persecution on religious grounds. Zubaidat wore short dresses. Anzor was clean-shaven. In any case, their application was quickly granted. Tamerlan joined them in 2003. At some point two sisters, Ailina and Bella, arrived in Boston.[28]

The Tsarnaevs were staunchly secular when they came to America. Like many immigrants before them, they were hoping to get rich. To the extent that failed integration was the cause of the brothers' extremism, much of the failure was of their own making. About five years into life in the United States, the mother and Tamerlan fixed on the idea that the family that radicalizes together, stays together. The father was the only one who did not follow the program.

The United States has accepted few Chechen refugees over the years[29] but while the Tsarnaevs are routinely described as Chechen they never lived in Chechnya, a war-torn Muslim-majority republic in the Russian Federation.[30] There is a large Chechen diaspora in Europe, where the Tsarnaevs also had relatives, but the ethnic and national affinities of the Tsarnaev family are complicated. The father is Chechen and mother ethnically Avar, which is a Dagestani ethnic group. Tamerlan was born in Kyrgyzstan, an independent state since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but the family later moved to Dagestan, which is part of the Russian Federation. Legally, they were Russian. This fluidity of ethnic affinities and legal nationalities is typical of displaced Chechens.

Their first years in the United States appear to have gone well. Anzor and Zubaidat followed in the footsteps of family members who had come to the country a few years earlier, and relatives helped the newcomers. Dzhokhar learned English so fast that he was able to skip a grade. Seventeen-year-old Tamerlan started going to Cambridge Rindge and Latin School. He also joined a local boxing club and in 2004, only eighteen months after coming to the United States, won his first local championship. People who knew him back then say that his aspiration was to represent the U.S. in the Olympics. Zubaidat went to beautician school and, in 2007 she got a job at a salon in Belmont, a rich suburb to Boston. Anzor set up a makeshift auto shop in a neighbor's parking lot.

The family were fabulists. They simply made stuff up. Anzor claimed that he had been a public prosecutor back in the "old country," and that was why they had to leave. This was untrue. In an interview with a local paper in Lovell, Massachusetts, north of Boston, Tamerlan said that he grew up in

Grozny, Chechnya. That was not true. He also said that he had studied music at a school in Russia and played the piano and violin, another invention. "I like the USA," he assured the reporter. "America has a lot of jobs. That's something Russia doesn't have. You have a chance to make money here if you are willing to work."[31]

Looking back, it is apparent that things began to go downhill in 2008. The salon where Zubaidat worked closed. She set up a beauty parlor at home, but the business did not do well. In 2009 Anzor got into a fight at a local Russian social club and was hospitalized for injuries. He appears not to have worked since. After graduation Tamerlan began attending a local community college but dropped out. He was more serious about boxing. In 2009, he won the New England amateur heavyweight boxing championship, but he lost a qualifying national championship match. The next year, in 2010, Tamerlan won the New England championship for the second time. However, because of rule changes that disallowed non-citizens from competing, he was not allowed to fight in the national competition.

One theory about what went wrong with the family is that Tamerlan turned against the United States when his Olympic dreams were shattered. That may be so, but both his coach and other boxers say that he was in any case not good enough to have made it to the Olympics.[32] He did, however, make use of his boxing skills to punish his sisters' boyfriends for infractions against the family honor. The sisters themselves were charged with shoplifting and other transgressions that included the possession of marijuana.[33] They dropped out of school and married.

Around this time the family found religion, but were guided by what they found online rather than the local mosque. Tamerlan and Zubaidat started self-study of the Koran in 2008. Zubaitdat subjected her customers to 9/11 conspiracy theories. Customers later told journalists that she seemed to have changed overnight.[34] All the Tsarnaev women started to cover up and to wear the hijab, the Muslim headscarf, although from photographs it is clear that their tight long skirts and sleeves, elaborate headscarves and heavy make-up would not have satisfied Al Qaeda's religious vigilantes. Meanwhile, Dzhokhar lived a double life at Cambridge Ridge and Latin as "Mr. Cool," selling dope, while embracing ideas about martyrdom and the obligation to carry out the armed *jihad* at home.

In September 2011, Anzor and Zubaidat divorced, and Anzor moved out of the apartment in Cambridge. In 2012, all the members of the family except Tamerlan were naturalized in Faneuil Hall in downtown Boston.

After they obtained American passports, both Anzor and Zubaidat moved back to Dagestan. Anzor's motives are not known but Zubaidat had to leave to escape her day in court on charges of shoplifting from an upscale department store in Boston's Western suburbs. Tamerlan and his wife, Katherine Russell, with their young child, took over the apartment on Norfolk Street in Cambridge. Dzhokhar also lived there when he was not in his dorm on University of Massachusetts campus.

The Tsarnaev family's slide into extremism involved Russian counterparts, whose identity is not fully known. In March 2011, two years before the Marathon bombings, agents from the local New England-area Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) opened an investigation into the activities of Tamerlan and Zubaidat. The review was initiated in response to a letter from the Russian FSB, the state security organization, which requested updates on the Tsarnaevs, whom the FSB described as linked to the Russian "bandit underground" of Islamist radicals. The request was prompted by the arrest in Russia of a Canadian-Chechen militant, William Plotnikov,[35] who had joined the Chechen jihadist group. Like Tamerlan, Plotnikov was a boxer. Sometime in late 2010, the Russians arrested Plotnikov, seized his phone, and gained access to his social media contacts. Among the contacts were the Tsarnaevs.

The Russians provided detailed information to the FBI and the CIA about the Tsarnaevs, including their address in Cambridge.[36] Three such requests were made by the Russians—in March and November 2011 through the established channels to the FBI, and in September 2011 to the CIA. The FSB alleged that in his exchanges with Plotnikov, Tamerlan had discussed going to the Palestinian territories to wage *jihad*, but had given up on the plans because of language difficulties. Interestingly, the FSB fingered Zubaidat as an important point of contact in the chain of online communications between Tamerlan and the Russian extremists. The FSB requested the FBI to inform them if Tamerlan attempted to travel to Russia. In September 2011, a similar request was passed through established channels to the CIA.[37]

The FBI and the JTTF nevertheless failed to pick up on signs that might have alerted them to potential risks. Once alerted, the FBI has six months to conduct a preliminary investigation in response to a report about a certain individual that is deemed to merit investigation. An extension of the investigation requires an administrative review and a decision to extend the investigation. The time limit on this type of investigations is strictly observed,

and in the case of the Tsarnaevs the investigation was closed and the record destroyed.[38] The FBI had found no evidence that Tamerlan—or his mother—were dangerously radicalized individuals.[39]

Tamerlan's quest

Tamerlan Tsarnaev's road to violent political extremism began with domestic violence and a murder. In 2009, his girlfriend reported Tamerlan to the police for domestic assault. Tamerlan was arrested and admitted to the charges. It later emerged that the beating was caused by the girlfriend's failure to follow a religious dress code. The household situation in Norfolk Street was complicated. Tamerlan appears at one point, before the girlfriend's call to the police, to have been living in a polygamous relationship there with her and his future wife, Katherine Russell.

Tamerlan and Russell married after she converted to Islam and changed her name to Karima. A year later their daughter was born.[40] But Russell had lived with her parents on-and-off during the pregnancy and after the child was born. It is unclear when she moved back to the Norfolk Street apartment. By 2011, she was the only income earner in the household and the family was dependent on food stamps.

Legal gainful employment was conspicuously absent from Tamerlan's biography. He studied at a community college in Boston after his graduation from Cambridge Rindge and Latin but dropped out and started to deliver pizzas for a local restaurant. He dealt drugs on the side. And he hung out with an older man, Donald Larking, whom he met at a local mosque. Larking, a convert to Islam, was sixty-seven-years-old at the time. He was also a rightwing conspiracy fanatic and a 9/11-denier. Tamerlan was twenty-four and a rapidly radicalizing Islamist militant. The two men became so close that Zubaidat, started to work as a home aide for Larking and his wife. Later, Russell took over the job.

Journalists from *The Boston Globe* interviewed Larking, who described his relationship with Tamelan in detail.[41] The bond between the two men is rich in irony. Larking shared the beliefs of "the truther" movement—a school of conspiracy theorists who argue, among other things, that the U.S. government was responsible for the 9/11 attacks and that the World Trade Center was blown up by the CIA or, perhaps, by the Israelis. Larking gave Tamerlan a subscription to a rightwing and notoriously anti-Semitic

paper, *The American Free Press*—"America's *Last* Real Newspaper," as the its title banner screams. Another magazine specializing in conspiracy theories on the two men's reading list was "The Sovereign—The Newspaper of The Resistance" [*sic*]. The paper's outlook is summarized by its manifesto, which is titled the "9-11 Truth Proclamation." The Sovereign Citizens Movement is a fanatical far-right anti-federalist movement.

According to the "Truther" account of 9/11, "seismographic evidence [...] prove that basement explosions occurred 14 and 17 seconds respectively for WTC 1 and 2 before the planes struck the towers," and that no airplanes ever struck the Twin Towers or WTC7, a third building that in fact collapsed not from getting hit by a hijacked aircraft but from the impact of the blast from the towers. "All fell down in approximately the same time as a freely falling object," according to the "Truth Proclamation" of the conspiracy theorists[42] The 9/11 Commission was a part of a grand cover-up. The Truther movement specializes in zany symbolism and advocate views that defy logic. Another plum argument spread around is that a janitor at one of the World Trade Center buildings is said to have described, in secret and never-revealed testimony to the 9/11 Commission, how he and others working in a basement office felt the impact of the explosion coming from somewhere below them, implying that the hijacked planes were not the real cause of the collapse of the buildings but rather a subterraneous never-revealed implosion caused by a) the Jews, or b) the secret government (take your pick). It is hard to explain why someone who embraced Bin Laden's mission at the cost of his own life would want to believe that Bin Laden didn't actually manage the attack.

After the Marathon bombings, a House of Representatives' report on the Boston bombing reviewed the cues that had been missed in the course of the FBI's investigation of the Tsarnaev brothers.[43] (A summary of the Russian security service's requests is included in the report.) Tamerlan was on two separate terrorism watch lists at the time, which the investigating FBI agent did not consult.[44] The report lists a number of other oversights and errors in the investigation, including inter-agency miscommunications that caused U.S. authorities to fail to notice that Tamerlan left the United States for Russia in January 2012.[45] The interviewing agent did not take note of the family's lifestyle changes that could have provided clues to their shifting orientation. Perhaps the FBI was disinclined to credit the Russian reports of extremism and suspected that the request for information was just another instance of Russian persecution of Chechens.

Tamerlan went through a second security check some time in 2012, as part of the procedure for naturalization. Again, no grounds for national security concerns were found. It is not clear if Tamerlan's naturalization process was delayed because of his girlfriend's domestic assault complaint and his arrest in 2009 on charges in connection with domestic abuse. He may also have been late submitting the paperwork. Whatever the reason, his parents and siblings had become U.S. citizens, but his application was still pending at the time of the bombings.

At some point in 2011, Tamerlan began crafting a new role for himself as an enforcer of the ideology he absorbed online. After the bombings, he was linked to a gruesome triple murder that had been committed in the city of Waltham, a suburb of Boston. The victims, three men, were all drug dealers. They were killed on the eve of September 11, 2011, ten years to the day after the 9/11 attacks. The date may be significant.

The victims were Brendan Mess, twenty-five, Erik Weissman, thirty-one, and Raphael Teken, thirty-seven. The bodies were found the next morning by one of the men's girlfriends. Their throats had been cut with such force that they were nearly decapitated. The bodies were covered in marijuana and cash—about $5,000 of it—was left thrown around. A local police official suggested at the time that it was an Al Qaeda-style attack but the crimes were unsolved until DNA found at the murder scene in the aftermath of the Marathon bombings was confirmed as belonging to Tamerlan Tsarnaev.[46] Weissman had been a longtime friend of Tamerlan. He was friendly also with the other men, and he too went to Cambridge Rindge and Latin. The men hung out together at a gym. Dope was a constant. Tamerlan allegedly was one of their customers and also helped them to sell marijuana.

After the Marathon bombings, a team of investigators interviewed another suspect, Ibragim Todashev. Todashev moved to Orlando, Florida after the Waltham murders. He too was Chechen and had also been granted asylum in the United States. Todashev was a Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) champion and engaged in a particularly violent version of the sport, as a so-called "cage fighter." He and Tamerlan knew each other from the gym where they both trained. Drugs were another shared interest. They may also have shared girlfriends. No evidence has emerged that connects Todashev with the Marathon bombing.

The FBI had already interviewed Todashev several times when a Boston-based team of four agents went with him to his apartment in Orlando.[47] In the course of a lengthy interview he unexpectedly agreed to

make a written confession. While he was writing out a confession letter, two of the agents left the apartment leaving the other two agents behind. Todashev got up and attacked one of them. The other agent shot and killed him.

The official inquiry suggested that the agents were extremely afraid of Todashev. He was unarmed but he was an MMA fighter, with a record of aggravated assault. There is no doubt that he was an extremely dangerous man, so it was odd that the investigators should choose to interview him in his own apartment. The death of a suspect at the hands of law enforcement during a routine interview is highly problematic. When the suspect is also a possible key witness to a terrorist incident it becomes catnip for conspiracy theorists. An official inter-agency inquiry threw little light on why the investigators proceeded as they did.

The motivation for the murders in Waltham also remains a matter for speculation. A photo of Todashev's unfinished confession letter was leaked to the press. In what has been made public, Todashev admitted he went with Tamerlan to the apartment in Waltham with the intention of robbing the drug dealers. He also wrote that during the robbery they "put them on the ground." But in this letter at least Todashev did not confess that he took part in the murders.[48]

In any case, the DNA match was made linking Tamerlan to the murders, and the two suspects were dead. The Massachusetts prosecutor pronounced the Waltham case "solved." But a lot of questions remain unanswered. If the murders were the result of a robbery gone wrong, as Todashev's incomplete confession appears to indicate, why was the cash left on the bodies? Were the murders really about something else?

Anne Speckhard, a psychologist specializing in terrorism, speculates that the murder of the drug dealers was inspired by the ideology the two men had started to absorb and should be understood as a political act. She writes that, "[w]hen viewed through the lens of a militant jihadi crime, it seems the murders—the way they were committed and the date they occurred—were possibly meant to convey a message about the corrupting power of the West and its tolerance for drugs, providing a militant jihadi answer—of annihilation and destruction."[49]

The ritualistic aspects of the murders do make sense when seen through the lens of what we know about Tamerlan's increasing political extremism. Perhaps the two men—Tsarnaev and Todashev—wished symbolically to break free from their former drug-dealing selves. (Selling and consuming

drugs is *haram*, forbidden, by Islam.) But if the murders were intended to send a message, the message was not received.

The murders made a big impression in Boston. Triple murders are rare. The circumstances were frightening. Waltham, the city where they occurred, is close to the university where I work. Several of my students were living nearby when the murders took place. All three victims were Jewish, so there were also speculations that the murders were a hate crime.[50] Maybe they were that—and more? To the fevered mind of a budding jihadist looking for something to do, ritualistically executing three Jewish drug dealers might make perverse sense. And yet a terrorist incident without a press release is simply murder. Why no statement of responsibility and no manifesto to justify the killings? An alternative interpretation could be that the act of killing was the objective in itself. Tamerlan knew he was heading for jihadist glory.

In January 2012, four months after the murders in Waltham, and three months after the visit to the family by the investigating agents, Tamerlan made a visit to Dagestan. The trip has been seen as the turning point in his radicalization—and with him, in the family's slide into extremism—but the chronology indicates that Tamerlan was a full-fledged militant looking to join action well before he went to Russia.[51]

Information is scant about what he did and who he met. His father and other relatives say he was just hanging about, but during his stay in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, Tamerlan is believed to have made contact with two Chechen Islamist insurgents, Mahmoud Nidal and William Plotnikov. The two men were in hiding at the time, sought by the police for their involvement in violent incidents. Nidal, who was twenty years old, was killed in May 2012, during Tamerlan's stay, in a shootout with the Russian police.[52] Plotnikov, twenty-three years old, a Canadian convert and also a boxer, had moved with his family to Canada from Western Siberia in 2008.[53] The family is Christian and Plotnikov converted to Islam in 2009. A year later, he left Canada for Dagestan to join the Chechen insurgents. This was when the Russian FSB obtained information about the Tsarnaevs' online communications with Dagestani extremists, which in turn lead to the FSB's warning about the Tsarnaevs to U.S. authorities in March 2011.

Tamerlan returned to Boston at about the same time that Plotnikov was killed in July 2012 in a firefight with the Russian police.[54] The web portal for the Chechen Al Qaeda affiliate, Kavkaz Center, declared Plotnikov a *shahid*, a martyr. Kavkaz Center turned out to be the Tsarnaev brothers' favorite online portal.

After the Marathon bombings, family members and people associated with local Islamist groups in Dagestan told journalists that Tamerlan drew attention to himself during his visit by dressing strangely, in a kaftan, and wearing kohl around his eyes. The dress code was Tamerlan's inept way of signaling his commitments. Internet sheikhs tell their followers to emulate the seventh-century dress of the Prophet's followers and to prepare themselves for martyrdom and paradise by shaving body hair (but keeping the beard) and perfuming their bodies, as well as lining their eyes with kohl. According to a jihadist site, authentictauheed,com, "The people of Paradise shall enter Paradise without body hair, *Murd* [excrement], with Kuhl on their eyes [...]"[55]

A school friend who met Tamerlan in a pizzeria in December 2012 testified that he was wearing a "big robe," had grown a long beard, and was hectoring people about the sins committed abroad by the United States.[56] The defense introduced a photo at the trial taken in the Norfolk Street apartment that was taken from the brothers' computer and released during the prosecution.[57] It shows Tamerlan dressed up, wearing kohl around the eyes and with a Palestinian *keffiyeh* on his head. Behind him, on the wall, hangs the White Standard for *jihad* associated with the Somali Al Qaeda affiliate, *al-Shabaab*. Play-acting, he is waving the old Ruger pistol the brothers used to shoot Officer Collier (see Photo 10.1.). The photo is so ludicrous it has the effect of making Tamerlan look like someone playing in dressing-up game. However, it wasn't just fun and games.

Reports are sketchy about where Tamerlan went during his to Chechnya visit and with whom he met. Apparently, he went to the Al-Nadira mosque in Dagestan, which has become famous in the annals of jihadism because Ayman al-Zawahiri, the emir of Al Qaeda, is believed to have stayed there in 1997 before he joined Bin Laden in Afghanistan. Tamerlan may have gone seeking contacts or perhaps merely as a type of pilgrimage.

Back in Boston, in July 2012, Tamerlan created a YouTube account with the Chechen jihadist Kavkaz Center and ratcheted up his displays of piety. He started to accuse family members and local shopkeepers of being "infidels." He was thrown out of the local mosque when he became enraged that the imam celebrated Martin Luther King's Day, protesting that King was a Christian and therefore an infidel to Muslims.[58] Hectoring behavior, the adoption of orthodox clothing styles, and plans to go abroad to join a foreign terrorist organization are typical benchmarks in the radicalization process of Western militants.

Photo 10.1. Picture of Tamerlan Tsarnaev taken in the Norfolk Street apartment from the brothers' computer. Date Unknown. The white version of the jihadi standard is associated with the Somali Al Qaeda affiliate, al-Shabaab.

Source: Admitted April 28, 2015, http://bostondefender.org/helpful-links/us-v-tsarnaev-defense-exhibits-2/

The requests made by the FSB to the FBI and the CIA suggested that Tamerlan had already started to explore how to become an armed warrior for the global *jihad* in 2011, well before the murders in Waltham. Doing something abroad and something at home are closely related events but the sequence is not necessarily *first* training abroad and *then* violent action at home. Sometimes, would-be foreign fighters fail to find a sponsor and instead take action at home.[59] If the Russian information provided to the FBI in 2011 is reliable, Tamerlan may have been frustrated twice in his effort to become a foreign fighter. Allegedly, he had considered going to Gaza to fight with the Palestinians but decided against it because of language problems. (He did not speak Arabic.[60])

Zubaidat would later say that her elder son was a full-fledged fighter in 2011. In 2012, around the time Tamerlan left for Russia, Russell was searching online for the rewards given to the wife of a martyr.[61] We do not know what answer she found, but her search might have been a disappointment. Replicate her search terms, and the reader may hit upon an online jihadist

advice columnist who told a woman who came up with a similar question that she would "become mistress [i.e., boss] of the virgins given to your husband in Paradise."[62]

The younger brother, Dzhokhar—called Jahar by his classmates—thrived in Cambridge. He was a bright student, quickly became fluent in English. He joined the high school wrestling team. During breaks he worked at the Harvard University pool as a lifeguard and found a job at a rug store in the neighborhood, owned by a neighbor who helped the family. (Dzhokhar's CV was introduced as an exhibit during the trial. It is available at the home page of the prosecuting U.S. Attorney: "Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's CV.")

Dzhokhar graduated from Cambridge Rindge and Latin in 2011. He had been supported by teachers throughout his school years, was much liked by teachers and classmates, and was provided with fellowship money.[63] That August he began college and moved into the dorms at University of Massachusetts's Dartmouth campus. When he graduated high school, he received a small prize given to good students from the City of Cambridge, and entered college with a state fellowship. Two weeks into college, his brother allegedly committed the triple murder in Waltham. We do not know if Dzhokhar knew about the murder but he clearly did not give college a chance.

In December 2010, his teacher from high school wrote in a letter of recommendation: "[Dzhokhar] is a strong student with a positive attitude. I enjoyed teaching him both as a freshman and as a senior because of his competitive academic drive and positive disposition. It has been a pleasure to have him at our school and I strongly recommend him to you."[64] Dzhokhar had taken honors math in high school. But that was not the student who turned up on campus.

Dzhokhar enrolled in the University of Massachusetts mechanical engineering program but in the first semester he passed only his courses in Spanish and English literature. He failed his college math and calculus classes. Over the next two semesters he passed only one class. His college record was abysmal. He received seven F's—outright failing grades—over three semesters. By the time of the bombings of April 2013, he was in his fourth semester and the university was in the process of revoking his admission.[65]

It is clear that Dzhokhar disengaged from his studies in his first semester. In fact, this type of disengagement is typical behavior among radicalizing individuals.[66] This would seem to date the onset of his growing radicalization to late summer 2011. Finishing college was no longer part of his life plan.

During the trial the prosecution introduced an Instagram picture of Dzhokhar that had been posted online with the title "my flag."[67] It shows him sitting with his leg casually flung over the armrest of the chair in the Norfolk Street apartment in the eternal pose of a male teenager. Above him is the black flag of *jihad*. Several such flags were found in the apartment when investigators searched it after the Marathon bombing.[68] The picture was probably taken at the same time as that of Tamerlan sitting under a white version of the flag. There are different versions of the flag, which usually carries calligraphy with the *shahada*, the Muslim declaration of faith, combined with a sword or other imagery indicating commitment to the violent *jihad* (see Photo 10.2.).

Dzhokhar posted the picture in his Instagram account with the subtitle: "My flag." His finger nonchalantly points to the ceiling. This was not an

Photo 10.2. Dzhokhar Tsarnaev posing under the Black Standard of Jihad in the family's apartment on Norfolk Street in Cambridge, MA. Picture was taken from his Instagram account, where he posted the picture with the subtitle: "My flag."

Source: An exhibit from the United States v. Dzhokhar A. Tsarnaev, Exhibit day 8, March 17, 2015 exhibit #1341.

innocent gesture. The pointing finger is a symbol used in tweets and Facebook postings by jihadists fighting the insurgency in Iraq and Syria. It symbolizes the principle of *tawhid*, monotheism, which is a battle cry for sectarian warfare against others, Muslims and non-Muslims, who do not share the jihadist belief system.

The brothers were active online, but their postings were mostly in Russian and were not picked up by law enforcement. They were active followers and posters on Kavkaz Center, an integrated online publication empire managed by the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus on behalf of Al Qaeda. The portal was accessible through different URLs incorporating some version of "Kavkazcenter" or "*Kavkaz-tsentr*," the Russian version. The site started in 2002, before a formal announcement of the Chechen Al Qaeda affiliate was made.[69] It functioned as a distributor of news releases and Al Qaeda propaganda as well as providing chat rooms and video file sharing. The site had Arabic, Russian, Turkish, and English versions. The English-language version of the portal was subject to removal by service providers, but the Russian version continued to function.[70]

Dzhokhar set up a Twitter account in October 2011, shortly after starting college, which was scrutinized after his arrest. His profile picture on the account—a roaring lion—is a reference, common in jihadist media, to the "Lions of *Tawhid*," the *mujahideen* who have decided to take up arms for Allah. On the day of the Marathon bombings he sent out several enigmatic tweets. "I am a stress free kind of guy," was one such tweet, sent right after he returned to his dorm room on campus (@J_tsar, Tweet 4/15/2013). The brothers may have shared their Twitter accounts. One, marked with a Lion's head, a symbol for the "Lions of Tawhid," a reference to martyrs, had over 1,100 tweets. "I shall die young," @J-tsar tweeted on April 12, 2012, a year before the bombing. Four days before the 2012 Marathon race, which Dzhokhar later testified the brothers had scouted for their planning of the attack the next year, a tweet was sent from the account saying "They will spend their money & they will regret it & they will be defeated."

Typical terrorists

The Tsarnaev brothers were in many respects pretty typical examples of Western jihadists. But no one picked up what was going on with them.

Dzhokhar's conversion was not sudden. While still in high school, papers that he wrote for his English Literature honors class regurgitated jihadist memes and a warped theory of world history. His teachers may have seen the statements as the reflections of a traumatized Chechen refugee but in fact his views echoed the tenets of Salafi-jihadism.[71] Both brothers became acculturated to the idea of extreme violence over a period of eighteen months to two years, and they had the support of an enabling environment of friends and family members. A study I did with my students of 135 American convicted jihadists that worked up forensic biographies of their radicalization from the available sources estimated eighteen months as the typical time frame for radicalization leading to violent action.[72] (The length of the typical trajectory is better measured by the median timeline rather than average time, because of outliers on the older end of the population.) A few people took ten years and even longer to get ready to take action.

Unusually, the brothers' mother helped make terrorist violence seem not only a normal thing to do but also the right thing, perhaps even something she expected of them. The radicalization process is associated with behavioral changes, and these usually take place in the context of peer-based networks.[73] Typically, the behavioral changes associated with radicalization are apparent to friends and family and may cause rifts between the radicalizing individual and the family. In the case of the Tsarnaevs, no rift took place because the family was part of the process. The father, Anzor, was perhaps the exception but little is known about him and his role in the family, which appears to have been largely passive.

Friends are another matter. The brothers lived in a circle of tacit support. Tamerlan's rants and lecturing about *jihad* were heard. Some people went along with it. Others turned their backs. One example is the brothers' relationship with Khairullozhon Manatov, a Kyrguz friend, who took them out for dinner on the eve of the Marathon attacks. The men went hiking in the mountains in New Hampshire on trips that they described as "training" for becoming *mujahideen*. Manatov would be charged and convicted of obstruction of justice for failing to inform the police of the identity of the bombers. He was sentenced to eighteen months in prison. The prosecutor could show that he had viewed the pictures of both Tamerlan and Dzhokhar on his computer after the bombing and had then frantically tried to reach them.[74] However, the police could not show any evidence that Manatov was involved in the planning of the attack, nor that he knew about the brothers' plans.

Todashev, Tamerlan's accomplice in the Waltham murders, also trained at the Wai Kru Mixed Martial Arts gym. He married Reni, a woman of Armenian origin, who converted to Islam and began to wear a hijab in the manner of the Tsarnaev women. It is not known if Todashev shared Tamerlan's extremist views on the *jihad* or was simply inclined to violence and controlling women.

Tamerlan and his friends shared overlapping identities as Chechens, martial arts devotees, and users and sellers of marijuana. They were all violent. Todashev had outstanding charges on assault in a parking lot and in a restaurant, but there is no evidence that he was radicalized politically. Plotnikov, the Canadian, who according to the Russians communicated online with both Zubaidat and Tamerlan, was also a boxer, and according to news stories, Plotnikov, Todashev, and Tamerlan Tsarnaev all belonged to sherdog.com, an MMA forum.[75] (Sherdog.com still exists. It set up a forum dedicated to the denunciation of Tamerlan Tsarnaev after the Marathon bombings.)

The nexus between violent Islamic extremism and extreme sports is not unusual. It is not that MMA turns people into extremists. Marital arts and boxing are a fast growing recreational sport and available in gyms everywhere, but extremists seek out these sports as part of their preparations for the apocalyptic combat they envision at the end of times, when the believers will engage in hand-to-hand combat with the infidels. Chechen extremists in Europe have shown a particular predilection for cage fighting and MMA sports.

The causal relationship is unclear. Are Chechens particularly attracted to these sports and, therefore, Chechen extremists are simply likely to share these tastes? Sometimes sport is used for recruitment and bonding. An extremist German group registered itself as a soccer club, *Dawa* FFM. Sometimes Islamic extremists go to the gym to prepare themselves for going abroad. Recruiters are known to tell their followers to prepare themselves for the final doomsday struggle, and some celebrity extremists have been into extreme sports, which are used to showcase jihadist masculinity. Denis Mamadou Gerhard Cuspert, a black German convert to Islam and a former rapper who became a celebrity jihadist combined it all. He had a career as a rapper in Germany under the name of Deso Dogg. He too was an MMA fighter before he joined ISIS and recreated himself as a larger-than life jihadist superhero, using the name Abu Talha al-Almani. (Almani is a reference to his German origins.)

Peer immersion online and offline

Sports may have been Tamerlan's gateway to extremism. He twice went to Austria, in 2007 and 2009, to participate in boxing training camps and to visit cousins living there.[76] The relatives are not suspected of having been involved in his radicalization, but Tamerlan may have had the opportunity to make connections in the small but tightly integrated jihadist scene in Austria.[77] Graz, the town in Austria where the Tsarnaev cousins lived, was a center for popularizing extremist Salafism in the early 2000s. An important German recruiter, Pierre Vogel, a former boxer, was known to be active there (Chapter 7, pp. 00–00). He used to preach at a pizzeria in Graz.[78] (The police in Graz banned Vogel from speaking there in 2012.[79]) In 2006 an Austrian, Mohamed Mahmoud, created the Global Islamic Media Front, a pioneering online portal that specialized in the translation of jihadist documents from Arabic into German and English. Mahmoud was arrested in 2007.

No evidence has emerged that Tamerlan met Vogel or Mahmoud. All the same, the Austrian scene was a closely knit milieu of overlapping communities of sports and extremism, so given what we know about networked social contagion it is possible that Tamerlan's contacts in Graz meshed up.

Tamerlan also hung out with Musa Khadjimuradov, a former Chechen rebel who lives in Manchester, New Hampshire, north of Boston.[80] Khadjimuradov, who is paralyzed, has denied ever discussing politics with Tamerlan, a somewhat implausible claim considering Tamerlan's tendency to hector people with his views. This is murky territory which was not much discussed in the prosecution of Dzhokhar, in part because the prosecuting attorney was loath to suggest that third parties were involved, since that might have set the court on a different track. And in fact, there is no reliable indication that any of these contacts offered anything more than a friendly endorsement of the brothers' growing anti-Americanism. It remains possible that Tamerlan was introduced to jihadist extremism while in Europe. He certainly had reinforcements from the intersected networks of family and friends, and in the far-flung Chechen diaspora and extreme sports.

Dzhokhar's friends were into drugs and videos rather than violence and extreme sports. They were also very loyal. Three of his friends at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth—Dias Kadyrbayev, Azamat Tazhayakov, and Robel Phillipos—would be convicted on charges of obstructing justice.[81] Kadyrbayev and Tazhayakov are Kazakhs and were enrolled as foreign students. Phillipos is local and went to high school in

Cambridge with Dzhokhar. The young men appear to have tolerated, even flirted with, the ideological beliefs that the Tsarnaevs embraced but they were not involved in the planning of the attack. However, they very quickly realized what their friend had done. After the bombings Dzhokhar went back to campus to be with them. What they did then is not known, but it appears that they hung out and smoked dope.

The friends met at Dzhokhar's dorm room right after the FBI released the pictures of the brothers and asked for the public's help in identifying them. Their first instinct was to protect their friend rather than call the police. They cleared out Dzhokhar's dorm room at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and disposed of it in a landfill. The things they took included Dzhokhar's Sony Vaio laptop computer, a thumb drive, a bag of marijuana, a baseball cap, an ashtray, and a backpack. In the backpack were empty fireworks from which the powder had been removed, and a half-empty jar of Vaseline.

The friends later turned against each other and two of them testified that Kadyrbayev carried the things out of the room and had said that he thought the fireworks and Vaseline had been used to make the bombs. They may well have known that Vaseline and recycled powder from fireworks are part of a standard recipe for how to make an IED, information circulated by Al Qaeda's Yemen-based affiliate in *Inspire* magazine.

The U.S. attorneys prosecuting the Marathon bombings case and the associated prosecutions were criticized for coming down too harshly on the youths. Masha Gessen went a step further from accusing the police of killing Tamerlan and accused the prosecutors of acting against these young foreign Muslims in a way they would not have chosen if dealing with local Boston kids.[82] According to Gessen and other critics, these were just kids who made a stupid mistake to cover up for their friend. This is fair—to an extent. The friends may also have been motivated by self-protective instincts. Their marijuana habit was illegal. Possession could have led to their being kicked out of college.

But there was also the matter of what was on the laptop. The friends would surely have known that Dzhokhar's laptop was loaded with jihadist sermons, manifestos, and jihadist rap music known as *nasheeds.* It also contained a digital library of classic jihadist texts, some more recent online publications popular with the new generation of English-speaking Western supporters, and copies of the ever-present *Inspire* magazine.[83] Some of this material had been watched a few weeks before the Marathon bombings. The most recent views identified by the analysis of the laptop were audio

files featuring Anwar al-Awlaki, which had been consulted on April 10, five days before the attack. The brothers were so addicted to Awlaki's preaching that they took recordings with them when they went on the run, and these were found in the stolen SUV. But the friends also watched it.

Watching jihadist propaganda is not an illegal act in the United States. Dzhokhar's friends may not have known that, but by removing the material they committed a grave criminal act. Had they called the police when it first dawned on them that their friend was one of the bombers, the killing of Sean Collier, the MIT campus policeman, might have been prevented. When the pictures of the brothers were released the police asked members of the public to come forward with identifications. That was at 5:20 on April 18. The Tsarnaev brothers killed Collier four hours later. Had the friends called the police rather than worrying about destroying evidence, Collier's murder might have been avoided.

Martyrdom and redemption

The Tsarnaev brothers were not good Muslims. They were emblematic of a figure invoked by Anwar al-Awlaki in one of his sermons, "The Man Who Went To *Jannah* [paradise] Without Praying." The sermon promises that sinners who embrace martyrdom will be rewarded in paradise.[84]

Marijuana is a recurrent theme in the brothers' story. Drugs were a source of income for them, and also seemed to be the engine of their social networks. It is believed that Tamerlan financed his travel to Dagestan by selling drugs. The pervasive presence of marijuana in their lives made friends, teachers, and acquaintances see them as "normal" youths rather than pious and dangerous fanatics. But it is a fallacy to assume that selling and using drugs are incompatible with becoming—or being—a religious extremist and a jihadist.

Drug abuse is *haram*—forbidden—in Islam. However, jihadism is not normal Islam. The audio recordings and the videos that the brothers owned included sermons and *nasheeds*, the religiously correct rap music that has become one of the most important proselytizing mechanisms among Western jihadists. These told them not to worry about their drug use. Martyrdom for the *jihad* cleanses all sins. The "good" Muslim who prays and goes to the mosque stands no chance of getting into paradise. Rather it is the man who never went to the mosque, who never prayed, and who committed

acts that are *haram* (forbidden), who may become a glorious martyr when he takes up arms for the struggle. Martyrdom for the sake of the cause washes away all sins and guarantees an instant transfer to paradise.

Evidence introduced in court from Dzhokhar's laptop included the sermon about the man who went to paradise without ever praying, together with *nasheeds* on the same topic.[85] These are easily found online. A quick Google search took me to five different YouTube versions, and a large number of forums where advice columnists explain the meaning of the parable.

Tamerlan and his drug dealing and the evident capacity for violence that he demonstrated in the Waltham murders are also not unusual among a new generation of radicals attracted to Awlaki and, after him, to the Islamic State. Just as drug use is common among the jihadists, so are gang affiliations. Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a member of the cell that killed 130 people and wounded hundreds in Paris in November 2015, walked away after watching his co-conspirators killing people at the Bataclan music hall to hang out and smoke marijuana in a Parisian suburb while preparing for yet another attack.[86] Anis Amri, the Tunisian who drove a truck into a Christmas street fair in Berlin in December 2016, habitually took drugs, and before the Berlin attack used cocaine and marijuana.[87] Both men were also at some point involved with gangs, as were the Tsarnaev brothers.

Accomplices

The gun used in the killing of the MIT police officer opens another window on the tangled network of friends and family who enabled the brothers' growing extremism. The gun belonged to Stephan Silva, a small-time drug dealer who was a friend of both brothers. The gun, an old Ruger 9 mm semi-automatic pistol, was the only weapon in the brothers' possession. Silva later testified that he lent the gun to Dzhokhar two months before the bombings.[88] This is the same gun that Tamerlan used as a prop in the Instagram picture taken in the apartment in which he appears in an outlandish imitation of Arab dress. According to Silva's testimony, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev asked to borrow the gun at a New Year's party, but Silva did not give it to him until February 2013. He testified that Tsarnaev wanted the gun to "rip some URI students," who had cash in hand from drug dealing. He might have meant students at the University of Rhode Island, which is located close to where Dzhokhar was staying at the dorms at

University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth. Dzhokhar also asked Silva for bullets, which he provided.

The gun and the ammunition were eventually traced to a gang of drug dealers in Southern Maine. They dealt in marijuana and cocaine and had ties to a Los Angeles-based gang.[89] It may have been from them that Dzhokhar got the drugs that he was selling and sharing with his friends.

There are unsolved—and uncomfortable—questions about whether the brothers had help or guidance in making the pressure cooker bombs. Dzhokhar told investigators that they built the bombs in the family's apartment on Norfolk Street and copied instructions from the 2010 issue of Inspire magazine. The construction of the bombs did not fully match the recipe provided in the online magazine, and aspiring self-made terrorists are known to have had trouble building bombs on their own. The brothers would have been crazy to risk building the bombs in the kitchen in the crowded apartment in Cambridge, where they lived with Tamerlan's wife and young daughter.

Homegrown terrorists usually have helpers. IEDs are not easy to make, and most homegrown American terrorists are not mechanically skillful. Incidents similarly relying on homemade bombs using the recipe published by *Inspire* have shown the devices to be unreliable. (An example is a series of bombs planted in the New York metropolitan areas in September 2017. The bomber, Ahmad Khan Rahimi, was caught and found to be an admirer of the Boston bombers and al-Awlaki.)

Maybe Tamerlan was better at putting things together than most Americans his age. A site where the brothers could have tested a prototype of the bombs that they used has never been identified. Some of components used in the bombs were found in Dzhokhar's backpack recovered from his dorm room. But the process of extracting powder from fireworks is messy and would leave residue that could not be cleaned away, yet no residue was found in the Norfolk Street apartment.[90] Maybe Tamerlan had hands-on instruction in how to make the bombs when he was in Russia? Or, perhaps, the brothers manufactured the bombs at a location that has not been identified?

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11

The ISIS Effect

The civil war in Syria transformed the landscape of Western jihadist networks. Over a period of five years, starting in late 2011, thousands of old and new militants journeyed to join the fighting there. Veterans of previous wars—like Slimane Hajj Abderrahmane (Chapter 8)—were called up. New recruits traveled in groups to join jihadist enclaves south of the Turkish border. Women and teenagers signed on for *jihad* at an unprecedented rate.[1] Small and midsized cities in the West suddenly discovered that they had to deal with local cells of Islamist extremists fired up by a civil war in a faraway country that none of them had ever seen.

An infamous video, produced in 2014, at the height of ISIS's recruitment drive that was broadcast on the Islamic State's online media sites and later on YouTube, featured four young men posing in the gamer-as-warrior style that the image makers favored: hipster-like long beards, dressed in fetching camouflage gear, and each with an AK-47 slung over his shoulder. The four men were nearly identical in looks and outfits, but one was black, one Arab, one Chinese, and the fourth was blond and blue-eyed. It was, of course, propaganda, and it worked. The enduring legacy of ISIS will be to have recruited more people to the global *jihad* movement than any of its predecessors.

The migration crested in the second half of 2014 and the first half of 2015. A bewildering array of groups cropped up in eastern Syria and in other parts of Syria outside the control of the Assad regime. The fighter groups were organized on the basis of language and national origin. French-speaking fighters joined French-speaking brigades. The Scandinavians hung out together. The British went with other British fighters.[2] The majority, maybe 80% if not more, joined groups affiliated with the Islamic State.

The civil war in Syria began in mid-2011, when mass protests inspired by the Arab Spring turned into an armed rebellion against the Assad regime. The conflict quickly escalated. The regime began to bomb and gas rebel forces. Al Qaeda was quick to see an opportunity.

In August 2011, the new emir of Al Qaeda, Bin Laden's old second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri and Al Qaeda's central command sent Abu Mohammad al-Julani to set up a mission in Syria. (The name, sometimes spelled al-Golani, indicates that he is Syrian and comes from the Golan Heights.) Al-Julani and a cadre of experienced operatives from the Al Qaeda high command set up *Jabhat al-Nusra*, also known in English as the Nusra Front, which was supposed to function as a united front organization for the various jihadist fighter groups. The establishment of the group was made public on January 23, 2012, but it had already made its first attack, a suicide bombing in December 2011 that targeted a military intelligence building in Damascus.

Al-Julani was a veteran of Al Qaeda in Iraq's insurgency in Iraq against U.S. forces that began in 2003. He too had been detained in Camp Bucca, the detention facility used by the U.S. military in Iraq. It was named after a New York City fire marshal who died on September 11, 2001, remome while trying to rescue people in the burning World Trade Center buildings. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (an alias for Ibrahim al-Samarrai), the man who would declare himself caliph and the leader of all Muslims in the world in 2014, was a cellmate. The Nusra Front was, following al-Zawahiri's vision, supposed to work as a broad front organization and high command for aligned fighter groups in the area, including AQI. In other words, al-Julani was the boss answering directly to al-Zawahiri's HQ and al-Baghdadi was theoretically under his command. By the time of Baghdadi's proclamation of the Islamic State, the former comrades had become mortal enemies.

The group known as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) started out in 1999 as *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad*. The founder and leader was the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Al Qaeda sent money, but relations between al-Zarqawi and Bin Laden were frosty. In 2003, the group mobilized to attack U.S. troops in Iraq and its membership swelled with volunteers. In 2004, al-Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and the group was rebranded as Al Qaeda in Iraq. When al-Zarqawi was killed in 2006, the group was rebranded once more, this time as the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). (It was still usually referred to as AQI.) By spring 2007, the U.S. was funding local Iraqi Sunnis to fight AQI as part of what became known as "the Awakening." AQI was pushed underground by 2009 and floundered after the United States killed a succession of leaders. In 2010, when AQI was at its nadir, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi became the emir.

U.S. forces withdrew from Iraq in December 2011. The timing unintentionally but unfortunately coincided with the opening of a new jihadist

offensive across Iraq's border in eastern Syria. In 2010, the U.S. commander in Iraq, Ray Ordierno, had declared that AQI's presence was "minimal." But in 2012 AQI recovered its strongholds in northern Iraq, buoyed by an alliance with disgruntled former officers in Saddam Hussein's army who had formed the Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order. AQI's rapid expansion should not have come as a surprise. A study released in 2013 by the Institute for the Study of War, a think tank based in Washington D.C., detailed how it had grown following the U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq.[3] A series of prison breaks carried out by AQI fighters freed many veteran fighters, who then joined the Iraqi Al Qaeda affiliate. The Assad regime lent a hand, releasing Al Qaeda prisoners from its jails, correctly anticipating that they would help the regime divide their opponents and beat back more secular, reform-minded rebels. The released prisoners went to their favorite fighter group, some to *Jabhat al-Nusra* and others to ISIS, or to a third group, *Ahrar al-Sham*, a coalition of Islamist and Salafist (but not necessarily jihadist in the fashion of Bin Laden) fighter groups.

In April 2013, al-Baghdadi moved his troops across the border and declared a unilateral merger with *Jabhat al-Nusra*. The organization formerly known as Al Qaeda in Iraq had by then become the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, i.e., Syria (ISIL or ISIS). The name change to include Syria indicated al-Baghdadi's ambition to create a transborder jihadistan. His ambitious claims exacerbated tensions with al-Julani and Ayman al-Zawahiri and in quick order led to the split.

In 2013, the city of Raqqa, a provincial capital in northeastern Syria, changed hands three times—from control by forces loyal to the Assad regime, to the Syrian opposition forces, and then to Al Qaeda and the Nusra Front, and then, finally, to ISIS. In January 2014, al-Baghdadi expelled fighters of the Nusra Front from the city and started building the institutions of a state: regulating prices, delivering electricity, fixing potholes, and establishing a police force.[4] At the same time, ISIS made the city its capital and exercised ruthless control. From its base in Syria, ISIS also made large territorial gains in Iraq. The group seized Fallujah in January and then captured Mosul and Tikrit, recovering territory that the U.S. military had fought hard to take back ten years earlier.

In February 2014, al-Zawahiri formally repudiated ISIS and blamed al-Baghdadi for sowing division among Muslims, *fitna*, and splitting the movement.[5] Jihadist militia groups in Syria and recruiters abroad, including those in Europe, were now compelled to choose between competing

factions. Meanwhile, al-Baghdadi purged the city of opponents. Western volunteers were brought in to populate the city, and their wives and girlfriends started to arrive from Europe to join them.

Then, in June 2014, al-Baghdadi announced the formation of a worldwide caliphate and anointed himself the caliph. Raqqa was declared the capital city. Once again, the group changed its name. It was now the Islamic State. It began to build its own international network, sometimes by means of straight out bribery, establishing affiliates known as *wilayats*, or "provinces," pockets of territory in Africa and Asia under their control.

Re-branded "the Islamic State" – or *'dawla*, as the enthusiastic fans called the rogue insurgent state on social media – the terrorist group had morphed into a pseudo-state. The new "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq was soon one great ethnic melting pot, attracting a flow of volunteers from Asia, Africa, North America, and Europe.

By December 2015, ISIS ruled over eight to twelve million people and controlled a territory the size of Great Britain, stretching in the south from an hour's drive to Baghdad, Iraq's capital, across northern Iraq to eastern Syria and on to the border with Turkey. Meanwhile, groups split off from Al Qaeda and declared their fidelity to al-Baghdadi, the new self-proclaimed caliph of an imaginary global caliphate. Offshore "provinces" including insurgent-held territories in a dozen countries from West Africa to South Asia which declared their allegiance to the Islamic State. Men from Saddam Hussein's dissolved Baathist officer corps helped to staff the proto state with a tax office, border controls and civil registry, and issued its own currency. ISIS held Raqqa for four years.[6]

Properties appropriated from refugees and former Iraqi government officials were given to the newcomers, who acted as colonizers. Draconian rules were enforced by the *hisba*, ISIS's morality police. Frenchmen and Britons executed Syrians and Iraqis in public, in front of their fellow villagers. Pakistanis and Chechens melted into the Islamic State's command structure. Later they would move on to the caliphate's new "provinces," commanding ISIS's troops in Libya and even further afield.[7] The fighters and their wives were paid and given benefits. Public works were undertaken, markets restocked. The new state was rich. (In June 2014, ISIS robbed the central bank in Mosul of close to 500 million dollars in cash and gold.[8])

The moment of triumph was fleeting. In July 2017, the Islamic State lost control of Mosul and Raqqa, the two main cities in the Sunni heartland, which the caliphate had made its centers of administration and plunder. It

still took a further eighteen months, and a protracted siege by SDF forces, a coalition of Kurdish and Arab militias backed by U.S. military units, before ISIS lost control of its last territorial stronghold in the Deir ez-Zor province in eastern Syria. The Islamic State made its last stand in February and March 2019, in the small town of Baghuz in Eastern Syria. It came to an end after a six-week siege and house-to-house combat between jihadist troops and the Syrian Democratic Forces. In October 2019, U. S. Special Forces killed al-Baghdadi in northwestern Syria.

In the last days of fighting, thousands of sick and starving men, women, and children emerged from underground tunnels.[9] The al-Hol camp, a displaced persons camp controlled by Kurdish forces and supported by international aid, swelled to more than 70,000 people, most of them women and children.[10] In Iraq, large numbers of foreign fighters are on death row facing execution. Among them are French fighters, including at least one woman, who have been sentenced to the death penalty. The wider humanitarian disaster in the region still has to be to be dealt with. ISIS continues to call itself the Islamic State but it has no state and has reverted to being an underground organization.

Al Qaeda followed a different strategy in Syria. In 2015, Iran released five members of Bin Laden's inner circle in an exchange for an Iranian diplomat kidnapped by Al Qaeda's branch in Yemen. The men had been held under house arrest in Iran since 2001. It was reported that the men went to Syria to set up a special group that according to the U.S. Central Command was tasked with carrying out attacks against the West, the Khorasan group. One by one, the men were killed in drone strikes.[11] Among the released Iranian detainees were Saif al-Adel and Abu Muhammad al-Masri, both founding members of Al Qaeda.[12] (Al-Masri was assassinated by Israeli operatives working with U.S. intelligence in Teheran, Iran, in August 2020.)

In July 2016, the Nusra Font changed its name to *Jabhat Fateh al-Sham*. Al-Julani declared that the group was "unaffiliated," which caused confusion about the group's proclaimed allegiance to Al Qaeda.[13] Then, a year later, the group merged with several other fighter groups to form *Hayat Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS).[14] Based in Idlib province in northeastern Syria, bordering Turkey, HTS is the largest jihadist organization in Idlib and acts as the local authority—providing food, enforcing its rules through the morality police, and generally running things. It has cordial relations with Turkey. The U.N. Security Council estimates it has up to 15,000 fighters.[15] Official U.S. estimates are lower. Revenues extracted from the cross-border traffic are a chief source of

income.[16] Al-Julani is the leader, so HTS should be considered a direct successor of *Jabhat al-Nusra*.

Al-Julani appears to have come to a tacit arrangement with Turkey, which allows HTS to control its own "jihadistan" south of a buffer zone in northern Syria that is controlled by the Turkish Armed Forces. The zone was created in October 2019 following an agreement between the Turkish and Russian presidents. The agreement had the support of the Syrian Democratic Forces, representing for the most part the Kurdish militia, which sees it as a buffer against a Turkish invasion. In an interview with the International Crisis Group, in January 2020, al-Julani declared that he and HTS had no intention of using Syria as a launch pad for "external operations," a euphemism for attacking targets in the West.[17] He also said that HTS had "been going systematically after ISIS cells in Idlib."[18] In the interview, al-Julani described relations with *Huras al-Din* (HD), another group that is considered to be an Al Qaeda affiliate, as "complicated." Allegedly, Saif al-Adel is one of the leaders, if not the leader, of HD.[19] It was estimated to have 3,400 to 5,000 fighters in Idlib, about half of whom are foreign fighters, among them hundreds of Europeans. All in all, the fuzziness of the relationships have caused sceptics to think HTS is a front organization for Al Qaeda with, as al-Julani put it, a "complicated" relationship with respect to the chain of command and the short-term tactics.

The foreign fighter calculus

The build-up of foreign fighters in Syria presents obvious parallels to previous surges in jihadist mobilization. In 2006, as U.S. troops were getting the upper hand over the jihadists, a U.S. intelligence assessment warned that the Iraqi insurgency would have long-term consequences: "We assess that the Iraq *jihad* is shaping a new generation of terrorist leaders and operatives; perceived jihadist success there would inspire more fighters to continue the struggle elsewhere."[20] In May 2014, James B. Comey, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, told Congress: "All of us with a memory of the '80s and '90s saw the line drawn from Afghanistan in the '80s and '90s to Sept. 11."[21] He warned that the insurgencies in Syria and Iraq could result in an even worse blowback than that experienced after Afghanistan and, later, Iraq. ("Blowback" is a term used by fire fighters for the moment when delayed combustion or escaped pressure reverses the direction of a fire.[22])

Comey was referring to the conveyor belt of militants who traveled to Afghanistan in the 1990s and returned home with new military skills. The 9/11 Commission estimated that 10,000 to 20,000 fighters underwent training in Al Qaeda-supported camps in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001.[23] They would staff the next phase of so-called "homegrown" terrorism. Fears of returnees from the training camps in Afghanistan and, after 2001, in Pakistan became a major concern after the attacks on the London Underground in 2005. Thousands of newly mobilized militants had flocked to join the Islamic State. After the defeat of ISIS, Western authorities worried that many would return to Europe, and engage in terrorist conspiracies at home.

After the 2005 bombings of the London Underground, which were carried out by young Muslim men who had grown up in the United Kingdom and had traveled through the militant pipeline to training camps in northwest Pakistan, Sir John Stevens, a former head of the Metropolitan Police, claimed that as many as 3,000 "British born or British-based people" had attended Al Qaeda's training camps.[24] Other expert estimates are far lower, converging on about 3,000 from all of Europe.[25] Thomas Hegghammer, a senior research fellow at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, estimated that perhaps a thousand people went from the West as foreign fighters between 1990 and 2010 but conceded that the real figure could be as high as 7,500. I use a different methodology to estimate the "blowback factor," but my estimate is close to Hegghammer's low figure.[26]

But how relevant is the past for estimating the blowback risk from the Syria mobilization? Not everybody agreed that Western governments should be alarmed. Writing in the *New Yorker*, the journalist Steve Coll argued that ISIS was fighting a sectarian war. It was more concerned with killing Shia Muslims than Westerners. He pointed out that, in the view of some specialists on terrorism, ISIS "has shown no intent to launch attacks in the West, or any ability to do so."[27] In a widely cited article in the *American Political Science Review*, Hegghammer argued that there is an essential philosophical divide between those terrorists who carry out attacks at home and those who go abroad to fight on behalf of Al Qaeda and its affiliates.[28] But, nevertheless, many of the Westerners who went out to fight in Syria and Iraq did return to attack targets at home.

In March 2012, Mohammed Merah killed three children and a rabbi at a Jewish school in Toulouse.[29] Also in 2012, a new local group led by two converts threw a grenade into a kosher butchery in Sarcelles, near Nice. The men all had contacts to what was then still AQI.

The first evidence of a direct "blowback" from the Islamic State came in 2014 when a series of attacks was carried out by returnees. In May 2014, Mehdi Nemmouche, who had spent a year in Syria fighting for the Islamic State, opened fire with an automatic assault rifle in front of the Jewish Museum in Brussels, killing four people. He escaped on the day of the attack and was arrested a week later in Marseille, by chance, during a routine drug search on a bus coming from Amsterdam. He was in possession of an AK-47 and a handgun. He also had a white bed sheet in his bag with "the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant" written on it and a camera with a forty-second recording of himself claiming responsibility for the museum shooting. The general assumption was that he was planning one more mission before achieving "martyrdom." It was subsequently discovered that to cover up that he was traveling back to Europe from Syria, he had flown back to France via South Asia and Malaysia.

It turned out that Nemmouche had a thick network of connections with other European Islamic State volunteers and that in the year before the shooting attack he had been involved in the capture of French hostages in Syria.[30]

During Nemmouche's trial, two French journalists who were released from captivity by ISIS in April 2014 testified that he had been among their hostage takers. Italian authorities also accused him of belonging to a group of six suspects who in 2013 kidnapped an Italian aid worker, Federico Motka, and his British colleague, David Haines, in Syria. Haines was beheaded in May 2014 but Motka was released. (It was suggested that the Italian government paid a ransom for him.) Nemmouche's cell allegedly included a Belgian and Frenchman, each infamous in their own way, and three British men, Aine Lesley Davis, Alexanda Amon Kotey and El Shafee Elskeikh.[31] Together with Mohammed Emwazi, who became known as "Jihadi John," the four men were dubbed the jihadi "Beatles" by the British tabloid press.

Returnees with combat experience and military training in an insurgent zone were responsible for the attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015. On March 22, 2016, members of the same network mounted attacks in Brussels, targeting the airport and a metro station near the European Union headquarters. One hundred and thirty people were killed in Paris and thirty-two in Brussels. Many hundreds more were seriously injured. And that was just the start.

The post-9/11 wave of attacks was all about bombs. This one, the ISIS wave, it turned out, was about guns, trucks, and knives.

Porous borders

In 2019, Europol, the European Union's coordinator on police matters, reported that since the beginning of the Syrian conflict many countries had seen between 20% and 30% of their jihadist émigrés return home. In Germany and the United Kingdom, the reported rate of returnees was between 33% and 45%. Given that the base number of travelers is uncertain, the reported percentages should be treated as rough estimates.[32] It is exceptionally difficult to assess how great a risk these returnees may represent.

From data collected by the Western Jihadism Project, we estimated the number of violent attacks that has occurred in the West, by decade and by continent, and sorted out those that were in some measure successful. The statistics show a dramatic increase in the number of successful attacks in the last ten years, see Table 11.1. Europe has taken the brunt of the jihadist campaign against the West. North America proved relatively immune. Australia avoided the impact until the most recent decade. Everywhere, however, there has been a dramatic increase in numbers. Casualty counts dominate the headlines but unsuccessful or not, more attacks equal more fear and ratchet up the efforts expended by authorities to prevent another attack.

Five principal factors brought about large changes in the global jihadist movement. In April 2013, ISIS announced the foundation of its theocratic

Table 11.1. Successful terrorist incidents attributed to the global jihadist movement, by decade and by continent.

Decade	Antipodes	Europe	North America	Grand Total
1990s	-	11	3	14
2000s	-	15	9	24
2010s	9	67	19	95
Grand Total	9	93	31	133

Note: Defining "successful" is tricky. Successful means the attack was not foiled because the would-be terrorists were caught before they could carry through their plans or failed to detonate or otherwise failed to actualize. Any instance where victims die is coded as successful. If the perpetrator (or perpetrators) dies before doing harm, it is not successful. Definitions may vary, so other researchers may produce different numbers. The way to read the table is therefore to compare one period against the next. The same definition was used across all three decades.

Source: Western Jihadism Project.

pseudo-state founded on the doctrines of Salafi-jihadism. It immediately had a large fan base. Second, local recruiters across Europe made themselves over into travel agents for the *jihad*. Third, there were great efficiency gains from using social media to connect would-be travelers with trusted contacts in the war zone. There followed a fourth and very important change, which was the lowering of barriers to join up as a jihadist. Anybody could now go to the caliphate. And finally, Turkey supported the build-up of Sunni fighter groups south of its borders by letting volunteers travel to the insurgency zones. People smugglers, refugees, human rights activists, journalists, veteran terrorists, and clueless teenagers in search of adventure clogged the towns and border crossings on Turkey's southern border to Iraq.[33]

Recruiters branded the migration a *hijra* to ISIS's caliphate. The term (also spelled *hegira*) refers back to the journey of Muhammad and his followers in 622 to Medina from Mecca, where he would launch his religious reforms. The teenagers and hardened fighters who flocked from Western Europe's cities to the old cities of Mosul and Raqqa were told that they were righting centuries of wrong and reconquering Muhammad's territory from the infidels. They certainly got into a lot of fighting. And policing. Teenage girls from East London flogged Iraqi women for not being dressed according to the rules set by ISIS's religious police.

The women often expressed a wish to become fighters, but when they arrived, they were directed to a dormitory controlled by the morality police and married off. Some of the Western women joined the *al-Khansaa* Brigade, the Islamic State's morality police, but they were also assigned to become wives of *mujahideen* (fighters). When their husband died, they were married off to another fighter after the requisite waiting period to be sure they were not pregnant. They moved into properties taken from local Muslims who had fled, and they bragged about the slave women who worked for them.[34] Their highest aspiration was (briefly) to enjoy high status as the widow of a martyr.[35]

Social media made it all seem easy. Guides were readily available. Those who had already made it to the other side told the new travelers what to pack and what to say: fly to Istanbul, don't tell anybody where you are going, say you are on a school trip/visiting family/a tourist, etc. From Istanbul, travelers could take the bus to Gaziantep in southern Turkey, where a smuggler would meet them and take them across to the Islamic State's border office. Once they presented themselves at the intake office, women would be sent on to a boarding house run by ISIS' morality police. After a

few weeks they would be matched up with husbands. The men would be interviewed and asked to if they wanted to volunteer for a martyrdom operation or to become a fighter. They would then be sent to a training camp for religious and military instruction.

In 2016, a defector handed over a large collection of immigrant registration forms from ISIS's border authorities to an online Syrian opposition paper, *Zaman al Wasl*.[36] In 2007, U.S. troops in Iraq had found similar records of intake interviews conducted by Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the forerunner of ISIS and the Islamic State.[37] The older documents, known as the Sinjar records, named after the location where they were found, gave researchers an opportunity to compare the two generations of foreign fighters, a decade apart, against each other.

Initial reports suggested that there were over 22,000 forms in the new cache, but an analysis by the West Point Counter Terrorism Center (CTC) identified many duplicates. A review of the two sets of files made by the CTC revealed some significant differences between them that were suggestive of a shift in motivations and expectations on the part of the travelers.

The 2016 batch of intake interviews had been collected by the General Directorate of Borders, an ISIS body responsible for tracking the immigrants. New arrivals were required to fill out a form on which they were asked to give their name, education, home address, age, and ethno-national origin; to nominate a person to be contacted in the case of death; and to state what they were volunteering to do. ("Suicide mission yes/no"). Over 40% of the recruits were foreign volunteers, mostly North Africans. A majority (56%) requested to become martyrs. In the earlier, 2007 batch, far fewer new recruits said that their first choice was to become martyrs (13%). The would-be martyrs divided almost evenly between those who wanted to die in battle (*inghimasi*) and those who opted to become suicide bombers.[38] In the 2016 batch, volunteers who opted for martyrdom were on average one to two years younger than volunteers who stated that they had come to join the caliphate as fighters. It is clear from the responses that the people who turned up on the doorstep of the Islamic State were already indoctrinated into the martyrdom cult. That, in turn, points to the importance of local recruiters and propagandists in driving the migration.

Analysts from the World Bank who also studied the files found that 69% of the applicants reported that they had at least a secondary education. Only 15% left before beginning high school. Fewer than 2% reported that they were illiterate. Recruits from all regions aside from Eastern Europe had a

higher level of education than the general population between the ages of twenty and thirty-five in their home region. Remarkably, the desire to become a martyr rose with the level of education.[39] Volunteers with no previous military training were the most likely to choose to become "suicide fighters."

The results go some way to establish the factors that drive recruitment. Economic factors did have some bearing. Unemployment among the highly educated in the countries of origin proved a positive correlate, whereas variables tracking general economic development and inequality had no discernable impact on recruitment according to the regression model developed by the World Bank analysts.[40] In other words, beware of disgruntled university students but generalized poverty does make a fertile ground for recruitment.

The Western travelers

The Western Jihadism Project has tried to keep track of the travel flows from Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States to the jihadist hotspots that attracted Western travelers. The results are displayed in Table 11.2.

European militants provided the largest segment of Western immigrants. In the beginning, migrating to the caliphate did not seem too dangerous. And once the Islamic State was a reality on the map, access was easy, at least for travelers from Europe and North Africa. The instructions were to book a ticket on a low-cost airline to Istanbul, go to the bus station, and take a bus to Gaziantep, an hour's drive from the border. There, contact was to be made on Kik or WhatsApp, to arrange to be picked up and taken across the border. People smugglers made a business of ferrying people back and forth across the border. The capital city of the Islamic State was only a four-hour drive away from Gaziantep.

It was not so easy to get to Syria from North America or Australia. Airports were under surveillance, so some would-be travelers to the "caliphate" tried to avoid North American airport controls by going south of the border, but that too generally did not work. In the United States, people who are caught on their way to join a foreign terrorist organization can be charged under a clause that was added to the anti-terrorism legislation in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, which prohibits providing "material support" to Al Qaeda and associated organizations. Until recently, few other

Table 11.2. Travel and attempted travel abroad to join foreign terrorist groups by Western jihadists by location, 1990–2019. Successful and foiled attempts included.

Insurgency	Immigrant	Native	Unknown	N
Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan	32	6		38
Kashmir	2	13		15
Chechnya	24	17		41
Afghanistan Camps (1990–2001)	216	152		368
Bosnia	55	22		77
Kosovo	4	2		6
Indonesia	4	2		6
US War in Afghanistan (2002–2014)	63	224	11	298
Iraq Insurgency (2003–2008)	75	76	6	157
Libya	7	5	1	13
Mali—Mauritania	11	14	4	29
Somalia	34	141	6	181
Tunisia		4		4
Yemen	11	59		70
Syria—Iraq (2011–2019)	323	1457	243	2023
Islamic State—Other Insurgent Location	7	8	2	17
Other	7	10	1	18
Total N	875	2212	274	3361

N = 3,057; 79 missing insurgency location. We know these to be travelers, who joined or attempted to join but don't know where they went or attempted to go to. Repeat travelers to multiple locations, N = 304.

countries had legal grounds for arresting people when they were about to leave, even when there was evidence that they intended to join a terrorist organization.

Perhaps the most remarkable finding is how popular travel abroad became among Western militants. More than half of the militants recorded by the Western Jihadism Project traveled or attempted to travel abroad. About 550 went to Afghanistan or one of the other locations associated with the jihadist hot zones predating the 9/11 attacks. But 60% of all the travelers went to Syria and Iraq between late 2011 and 2018, when travel through Turkey became difficult and the Islamic State's caliphate was embroiled in a guerilla war.

We identified 3,053 people, close to 60% of the data set, who wanted to or did travel abroad to join a foreign terrorist group. (Some individuals made trips to more than one location, so there are 3,361 instances.) We may have underestimated travel to jihadist hotspots before the 9/11 attacks because it was legal, but early in the 2000s joining a foreign terrorist organization was criminalized and authorities were paying attention.

Going abroad to join a foreign terrorist organization or to fight in an insurgency is more attractive to homegrown militants than to immigrants. Homegrown travelers outnumbered immigrant-origin travelers by approximately 2.5:1 (normalized).

Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) were popular but more difficult destinations for the Westerners. The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 opened up another destination for the Western militants but it was even more difficult territory. Western volunteers who did go to join Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq were often veterans from Afghanistan or Bosnia, and other struggles around the world, or they had preexisting ties to established jihadi networks. Some were connected to the Algerian, Tunisian, Moroccan, and Syrian networks of exiles in Europe.

The Islamic State initially presented a very different image. Its social media propaganda machine featured bushy-haired teenagers holding up a jar of Nutella (a popular chocolate-hazelnut spread in Europe) in a shop in Raqqa. They blogged about the beautiful life young people were living in the caliphate.[41] The ISIS cohort among the Western travelers was demographically markedly different from the previous waves. They were younger on the whole. Some were teenagers. But a few septuagenarians traveled to the new "caliphate." Women and whole families came, too. Many were recent converts to the cause who made contact with the Islamic State through friends and recruiters.

But many more foreign fighters died in Syria and Iraq than in past insurgencies. There will therefore be proportionally fewer returnees and, perhaps, given the number of very young volunteers, a larger proportion of those who do go back home will have regrets or for some other reason will pose no domestic threat.

Networks, networks, and networks

Populist street preachers, streets gangs, and family networks spread the word. The European fighters who went to Syria and Iraq were deeply enmeshed in local networks that had been responsible for violent incidents in West before the Syrian conflict. Many were veterans of previous wars. However, the new generation of travelers was generally much younger than previous cohorts. In Bosnia, the average age was thirty. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, before and after 9/11, the average was around twenty-seven. The median age

for going to Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya was between twenty-five and twenty-six. In the first jihadist insurgency in Iraq (2004–2007), the median age of the fighters was nearly twenty-eight. The median age for the travelers to the Syrian insurgency and the Islamic State was twenty-three. (The age statistics were calculated from the data displayed in Table 11.2.)

Twitter, Facebook, and other social media have been held responsible for the recruitment of teenagers, but this is not wholly accurate. In 2013 and 2014, when the wave of migration peaked, the Islamic State was looking for settlers to populate the territory rather than fighters. The decision to recruit indiscriminately among the very young grew out of the Islamic State's colonizing strategy. The doors were flung open. The ISIS generation was far more diverse in terms of ancestral origin and race than previous waves of jihadist travelers. White Europeans, among them many converts, comprised about 20%. Gang members from Europe's ethnic enclaves and dropouts from universities and prestigious private schools joined up.[42]

Then, there were the women. They hoped to become the widows of martyrs, but they also pushed against the boundaries of the roles traditionally reserved for them by jihadist doctrines. They set up female-only fighter groups and took a prominent role on social media, posting pictures of themselves with mutilated corpses. If allowed back home, how many of them will pose a serious threat to the West? There are some recent examples of women participating in violent attacks, but there is no evidence yet that a significant number of women are being drawn to domestic terrorism.

In Western Europe, in Sydney and Melbourne, and perhaps also on a much smaller scale in some of the Canadian cities affected by the ISIS wave of mobilization, there was an epidemic of social contagion. Epidemiologists explain the spread of social diseases and public health problems in terms of "contagion," by which they mean that people catch germs and viruses from infected people with whom they are in contact. "Social contagion" has been defined as "the process by which a person catches an idea or behavior from another person."[43] Today a person—certainly a young person—is likely to catch an idea from a social network. Individuals belonging to the same network tend to see themselves as socially similar. They are therefore predisposed to find value in the ideas, styles, preferences, and life choices of presumed peers.

Contagion effects can take many forms, ranging from sudden shifts in attitudes to the adoption of new technologies. For instance, if your friends and family, employer even, use Facebook or Slack, then you too will need

to be on Facebook and use Slack if you want or need to follow what is being said in your social or business circles.[44] But for the susceptible, the effects can be transformative. Herbert Blumer, a sociologist, regarded social contagion as central to a broad range of group behaviors that an individual would not undertake under normal circumstances, including taking part in "crowds, mobs, panics, manias, dancing crazes, stampedes, mass behavior, public opinion, propaganda, fashion, fads, social movements, revolutions, and reforms."[45] Political sociologists and behavioral economists have used the concept of social contagion to capture the process by which riots spread, cults grow, or financial panics take hold.[46]

Preexisting relationships bolster cohesive and effective network structures. Network science refers to this phenomenon as network homophily, the tendency for people to form ties with individuals who are in some way similar (the "birds of a feather" argument).[47] The basic assumption here is that to become a terrorist you have to get to know one.

The "neighborhood" in which social contagion is most likely to happen may be virtual, a site on the internet. In the case of ISIS, however, it was more commonly a few streets in a gritty urban area, dominated by members of a particular ethnic group, full of friends and family members. Terrorist networks are parasitic on hospitable preexisting social network structures. If you lived in Molenbeek (Brussels), or Angered (Gothenburg), or in Sparkbrook (Birmingham), contact with ISIS's migratory network might be one friend away or be accessible through a cousin who knows somebody.

Neighborhood-level recruitment generates "small-world" network structures, in which any one member of the network is likely to have multiple ties to any other member. In network theory, small-world networks are composed of actors and entities (nodes) that are not direct neighbors of each other but in which any given node can reach out and have contact with most other nodes in the network through a small number of steps or links.

In addition to ties of friendship and family, gang membership has recently provided a route to jihadism. The new crime-terror nexus integrates localized criminal and extremist networks. There are many reasons why terrorist movements might want to recruit criminals. They are accustomed to clandestine organization and are hardened to violence. And gang members are very loyal to one another.

In the case of the new generation of jihadist extremists from Australia, Europe, and North America, being Muslim or a convert to Islam does not significantly raise the odds of becoming a terrorist. The key predictor is who

the person hangs out with. The problem is typified by Molenbeek, a neighborhood in Brussels where it would appear that most people knew someone or knew someone who knew someone who had gone to Syria.[48]

Mobilizing the recruits

As the migration to Syria built up through 2013 and 2014, recruitment to the insurgency was nurtured in neighborhoods all over Europe. The schism between Al Qaeda and ISIS caused unease among Western militants. Abu Fulan al-Muhajir, who tweeted under the handle @fulan2weet, was asked why he did not join ISIS. His response indicated strong partisan feelings: "ISIS aren't an AQ group. I agree with the original AQ and love their work." But, back home, in Europe, the recruiters for a while papered over the split by flying the flags of both groups. Pierre Vogel (aka Abu Hamza), the previously mentioned convert to Islam turned preacher who for period preached in both Germany and Austria, told his followers to keep quiet about the division. "It bothers me a lot and it worries me deeply to see brothers who loved each other one day for Allah argue the next day about which of them is supporting the correct Islamic group in Syria. [...] Folks, do not allow this *fitna*, close this door."[49]

For two years, travel to the insurgency in Syria continued, not much troubled by Western government agencies. Border control agencies protested that they could not be expected to prevent people from leaving the country, since traveling abroad was legal. A British Home Office official with whom I spoke in 2013 expressed what many people thought at the time when he said, "Isn't it better that they leave and get themselves killed down there?"

But if they couldn't be prevented from going abroad, there was also no way to prevent travelers who were citizens, or legal residents, from returning home.

The Western Jihadism Project tracks individuals who are known, through public sources, to have been arrested, or who went abroad to join a foreign terrorist organization (or attempted to do so), and/or who died in connection with terrorism-related incidents. However, unless people are arrested and a public record created, it is difficult to know who traveled to Syria, who came back, and who is still missing, or dead. Many deaths are never confirmed. Trials run on and on, so that sometimes we have to wait years to get a full picture.

In September 2020, fourteen people went on trial in Paris charged with providing logistical support for the men responsible for the terrorist attacks that killed seventeen people in Paris in January 2015.[50] The perpetrators were dead. On January 7, just before noon, two brothers, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, mounted a lethal shooting attack on the editorial staff of *Charlie Hebdo*. Two days later, their friend and co-conspirator, Amedy Couilbaly, attacked a Jewish supermarket on the outskirts of Paris. After taking the staff and customers hostage, he asked the victims if they were Jewish and shot them when they answered in the affirmative. The gang also killed two policemen and wounded several other victims.

The initial public impression was that the attacks were the spontaneous work of two disgruntled brothers and their friend. It is not accurate. The attackers drew on contacts that they had forged in prison and before they went to prison, and from a mixed milieu of international and local extremists, street side peddlers and users of drugs, and gangs peddling weapons. The fluid and overlapping networks provided both logistical and ideological support. We now know that the attacks were commissioned by Anwar al-Awlaki four years earlier, and that the Islamic State took over sponsorship after al-Awlaki's death.

Three suspects were missing in court and were tried and convicted in their absence. Two of the three missing co-conspirators are brothers who are presumed to have died fighting for the Islamic State. The third, Hayat Boumeddiene, was Coulibaly's wife. Hayat is missing but is presumed to be alive. She left France for the Islamic State a few days after the attack. She was sentenced in absentia to thirty years in prison. The other men were given sentences ranging from four to thirty years in prison.

The Kouachi brothers and their friend, Coulibaly, drew on a rich network of local drug runners engaged in weapons smuggling and glocalized extremists with deep connections to the transnational jihadist networks. The men present in the court in France had helped the three attackers obtain weapons and tear gas through a French-Belgian crime network for the attacks. The court assessed that three of the men were not fully aware of the terrorist aims of the three attackers but concluded that the others fully knew what the intentions were. One of the men who was not found "innocent" of terror convictions, Amar Ramdani, had met Coulibaly in prison. He and his cousin, both also drug runners, made six trips from the French border to Belgium to pick up weapons. The two men cited their engagement in drug trafficking as a defense against the terrorism charges. Going to

jail on drug charges is much, much preferable to going to jail for a terrorist offense. The court believed one of the cousins but not the other.[51]

The networks revealed in the court case highlighted the close connection between jihadists and drug and weapons smugglers in this part of Europe. The French prosecutor initially charged twenty-four people with aiding the attackers, including Peter Cherif, a French militant who converted to Islam in 2003 and was part of the network known as the 19th arrondissement group, *la filière irakienne* (see Chapter 7), that supplied recruits for Al Qaeda in Iraq in 2004. What we know about Cherif suggests that he had an impressive contact list to the top people in the glocalized jihadist organization.

Cherif was captured as an enemy combatant by the U.S. military in 2005 in Iraq. He was detained in Camp Bucca and then moved on to the infamous Abu Ghraib prison, and after that another prison in Iraq. The Abu Ghraib facility was a notorious prison under the Saddam Hussein regime that was repurposed by the U.S. army as a military prison to hold both ordinary criminals and political prisoners. In 2004, photos taken by U.S. army personnel at the detention center were leaked to the public. They showed female guards holding naked detainees by leashes attached to their necks and exposed the use of nudity and attack dogs to control inmates. The photos caused an international outrage.

Cherif escaped in a prison break in 2007 but was arrested by the Iraqi authorities and repatriated to France to stand trial. He was released while awaiting trial (a common practice in Europe) and fled France for Yemen, where he joined AQAP, Al Qaeda's Yemen-based affiliate.

According to French sources, Peter Cherif was present in Yemen when Chérif Kouachi met al-Awlaki in Yemen and got his endorsement of plans for an attack on the editorial office of *Charlie Hebdo*. Al-Awlaki had advocated such attacks against those who "insult" the prophet on YouTube since 2011. His lecture calling for revenge against cartoonists mocking the Muslim prophet from 2008 titled, "The Dust Will Never Settle Down," has inspired many such attacks, although few have been successful. It is still available online. (The lecture is deliberately not referenced here.)

Kouachi bragged about the sponsorship in a call with a French TV station shortly before he died in a shootout with the police: "I was sent, me, Chérif Kouachi, by Al Qaeda of Yemen. I went over there and it was Anwar al Awlaki who financed me." The television channel aired the statement after the siege was over.[52] Al-Awlaki died in 2011. The attackers' eagerness to give

credit to both al-Awlaki and the Islamic State suggests that the *Charlie Hebdo* plot was at least four years in the making.

Peter Cherif was arrested in Djibouti in 2018 together with his wife and children. He is presently in French custody and was called as a witness in the trial of the *Charlie Hebdo* co-conspirators but was not part of the trial. It is expected that he will be tried separately. More information about the networks responsible for the wave of attacks that began in 2014 will become public as more trials commence related to the *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyperchacher attacks and the subsequent attacks in Paris in November 2015 and Brussels in March 2016.

It often takes years to find out who is who, and which roles they played in conspiracies that went from merely counter-cultural networks to criminal ones. And then there is the question of where persons wanted for trial might be by the time a prosecutor or a court is able to issue charges. European authorities are understandably reluctant to make any assumptions about the current whereabouts of people wanted for trial. Hundreds of Europeans are now languishing in jails and detention camps in eastern Syria and in Iraq. Many more have moved elsewhere, to North Africa, Afghanistan or to the Philippines, which are some of the locations that have cropped up as new destinations after the collapse of the Islamic State's territorial incarnation. Individuals who have been presumed dead have sometimes later turned up in prisons in Iraq or on the battlefield. An example is Omar Diaby, also known as Omar Omsen, a French-Senegalese rapper from Nice turned jihadist entrepreneur, who admitted faking his own death in August 2015 when he wanted to leave the combat zone in Syria for a period.[53] Diaby set up his own group in Idlib, Syria, called the *Firqatul Gharaba* brigade. He was "arrested" by HTS, al-Julani's group, in September 2020. It is not known why he was taken in or what has happened to Diaby.[54]

The European bases rise again

Networks such as these provided the infrastructure for the exceptional mobilization of a new generation of jihadist militants in Europe after 2010. The most important node in the recruitment network that put European militants in touch with Al Qaeda's centers in the Middle East and, later, the Islamic State in the period roughly between 2011 and 2017 was a trans-European consortium of extremist groups associated with the British-based *al-Muhajiroun*.

Between one-quarter and one-third of all Western foreign fighters who traveled to join the jihadist insurgent groups in Syria and Iraq are thought to have belonged to one of the group's British incarnations or its branches in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Spain.[55] (Fronts with names that appeared to suggest a presence in Pakistan and India—such as Sharia4Hind—have also occasionally been heard from but these were shells set up by a few people in London.)

Omar Bakri Muhammad, *al-Muhajiroun*'s founder, left the United Kingdom voluntarily in August 2005 and resettled in Lebanon. From there he continued to preach to his supporters over the internet but he left the management of the organization to Anjem Choudary, a British-educated solicitor, whom he appointed his "European emir."

Successive proscription orders eventually drove the organization underground in Britain, but it continued to prosper elsewhere under new names, under Choudary's leadership. Proscription is a powerful but rarely used tool. In the United States, even extremist speech is given constitutional protection. In most European countries, governments can arrest a person simply for being a member of a proscribed group, or for giving it assistance.[56] Even in Europe, however, states rarely coordinate their efforts to criminalize particular groups. A recruiter who is attracting unwanted attention from the authorities in one country could just move across the border. So when, by 2011, Islam4UK and its various aliases had been banned in the United Kingdom, Choudary was still able to reach audiences abroad, even on conservative TV stations in the United States, where his outrageousness reinforced prejudices about Muslims.

Choudary then moved his more routine operations online. (Internet service providers have taken down many videos of his rallies and interviews, but they may still occasionally be found on YouTube.)[57] Since he had not yet been convicted of any crime, he was able to travel freely outside the United Kingdom, meet with followers, conduct press conferences, and appear on TV.[58] Connecting with locals who had been visitors to "Londonistan" in earlier years, he developed a Europe-wide syndicate.

When Al Qaeda and the Islamic State split into warring camps, Western militants were put in the uncomfortable position of having to pick sides. Some celebrated the proclamation of the "*khalifah*" while continuing to support Al Qaeda. At first, Choudary tried to keep a foot in each camp, but he found that his followers were ecstatic about the opportunities for travel opened up by the Islamic State. Ironically, it was his belated support for the

Islamic State that finally landed him in trouble. In August 2014, in a series of YouTube videos, Choudary and a sidekick, Mohammed Rahman, instructed their supporters to support and obey the new caliphate. In September 2016, the two men were sentenced to five and half years in prison for providing assistance to an illegal organization.

Mapping the *al-Muhajiroun* network is relatively simple.[59] The various groups in Choudary's orbit present themselves as independent, bottom-up franchises but were at the same time keen to advertise their associations with the wider network. In most cases, there were close personal contacts between the deputy emirs of the groups and Choudary himself, ties that predated the creation of the new affiliates in the European consortium. Other affiliates were under local leadership, and their attachment to Choudary and his organization was a branding gimmick. In yet other cases, the "affiliate" was an empty shell. "Sharia4Poland" (not depicted in the graphic), for example, appeared to be the handwork of a single blogger based in London, who created a phantom online front in Polish.

The interpersonal links that connect the European affiliates and franchises to Choudary's organization can easily be traced through the public record. Choudary wanted attention, and he got it. The trans-European network is depicted in Figure 11.1. The graphic maps all the verified personal contacts that we identified on the basis of the social media postings of participants and their arrest records.

Thirty separate but connected organizations are included in the graphic. Some were direct affiliates headed by sub-emirs who recognized that they were subordinate to Choudary and his boss, Omar Bakri Mohammed. Others were groups that had been started up by street preachers but brought into the syndicate by the local emir.[60] First-degree contacts to Omar Bakri Mohammed (seventy-three verified first-person contacts) and Anjem Choudary (ninety-nine verified first-person contacts) are not depicted in the graphic because they are so numerous that they would clog the visualization.

The Sharia4 networks functioned as transmission belts to the insurgency (see Figure 11.1.). A total of 317 (63.2%) of the 502 people we identified as direct members of one of groups traveled abroad or attempted to travel abroad to join the Islamic State or another jihadist fighter group.

Applying the "Friends of Friends" rule that networks are vehicles of community contagion, we added another 879 people who were known contacts of the direct members of Sharia4 groups, producing a data set of 1,381 people. Of this group, 57% joined a foreign terrorist group, of whom

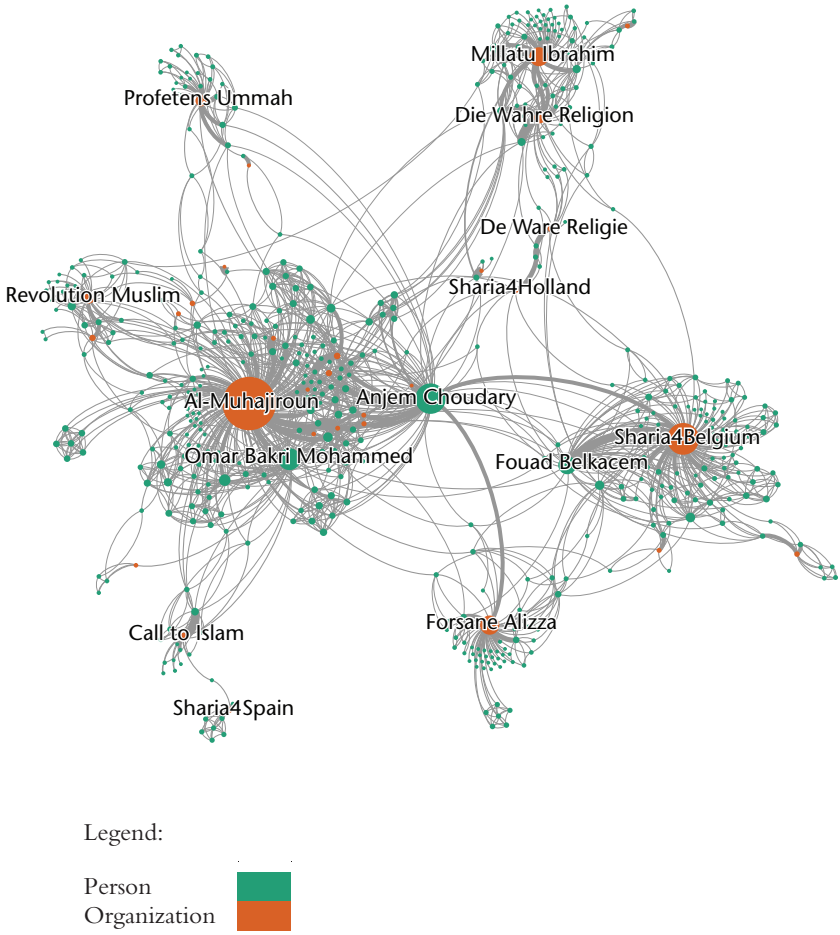

Figure 11.1. Network map of Sharia4 organizations, nodes scaled by hub centrality. Created in Gephi by Rosanne Libretti.
Notes: Node N (persons) = 502; Node N (organization) = 30. Total edges, N = 1,810
Source: The Western Jihadism Project.

about 80% went to the Islamic State: 288 are known to have died. It is a measure of the scope of the *al-Muhajiroun* network that these members of Sharia4 groups and their immediate friends comprised close to a quarter of the entire thirty-year dataset of foreign fighters culled from the Western Jihadism Project's data collection.

The Sharia4 network

Anjem Choudary moved his activities to Europe in early 2010 after the British government proscribed the most recent incarnations of *al-Muhajiroun*, the best known of which was Sharia4UK. The expansion of operations to Europe started before the Syrian civil war, which opened a new window for the militants to mobilize for armed *jihad*. When the opportunity arose, Choudary's syndicate became the most important transmission belt for bringing Europeans to the Islamic State. The expansion of operations to continental European countries did not mean that Choudary neglected his British followers. Birmingham was home to so many jihadists that the tabloid press refers to the city as "the jihadi capital of Britain."[61] Most came from just four wards in the city. We traced nearly all of them to Choudary's organization.

The flagship organization among Choudary's European syndicates was Sharia4Belgium. It started out in Antwerp but later moved its activities to Brussels. The local emir was Fouad Belkacem (alias "Abu Imran"), who in the past had been a drug dealer and a car thief, and engaged in other typical street crimes. He had a number of criminal convictions, among them in connection with a VAT fraud scheme and on charges related to car thefts. In 2009 he was sent to prison for eight months on charges of racist anti-Semitic hate speech. In 2004, this petty criminal jihadist had stood for parliamentary elections representing an anarchist group.

Then he became a street evangelist for violent *jihad*. Belkacem co-founded Sharia4Belgium with Choudary after a visit to London in early 2010. Within a year, the Belgian authorities began to take steps to suppress the group. In April 2011, Choudary and Belkacem attempted to go to Paris—with press in tow—to lead a demonstration organized by a fraternal French group, *Forsane Alizza* (Knights of Pride),[62] protesting against a ban on the wearing of the burka. They were arrested and permanently banned from France.

In 2012, Belkacem and Choudary organized what they called the Global Shariah Conference together with their Dutch affiliate, Sharia4Holland. Anticipating a ban, Sharia4Belgium dissolved itself in late 2012. The crackdown began in April 2013. Forty-six members of Sharia4Belgium were indicted in the city of Antwerp. Only four turned up for the first court hearing. The others are assumed to be in Syria and Iraq. Sixty or more

members of Sharia4Belgium were thought to have traveled to Syria to join ISIS. In February 2015, Belkacem was sentenced to twelve years in prison on charges of recruiting for ISIS. He was stripped of his Belgian citizenship. It is expected that he will be extradited to Morocco, where he is wanted for drug trafficking.

Forsane Alizza was the French subsidiary of *al-Muhajiroun*. Created in August 2010, it was previously known as *Sirat Alizza*, and in another incarnation as "*Collectif Tawhid*." The leader, Mohamed Achamlane, also used multiple aliases including "the Brain" and "Sheikh Abu Hamza." Choudary was apparently not initially involved in the group but a merger of sorts was arranged. One of his London sidekicks, Abu Izzadeen (aka Trevor Brooks), can still be seen in a video on YouTube at an early demonstration in La Courneuve, a Paris Suburb, in April 2011, telling the interviewer that Islam will rule the West.[63]

The group was banned in the aftermath of the Toulouse shootings on March 1, 2012. The shooter, Muhammad Merah, with his extended family of extremists, had all been associated with it. In 2012, eighteen members of *Forsane Alizza* were arrested in Nantes alongside their leader, Achamlane. Among those arrested was Willie Brigitte, a convert from Guadeloupe, a French overseas territory, a man in his fifties. Radicalized after serving in the French navy, he converted to extremist Islam in 1998, when he joined the GSPC and went to Yemen for religious education. Brigitte tried to join a training camp in Afghanistan in 2001, but his timing was poor. Arriving as Al Qaeda fled Afghanistan, he was redirected to Pakistan, to one of camps run by *Laskhar-e-Taiba* that was used by Al Qaeda. From Pakistan he went to Australia, where he was implicated in an ambitious plot to bomb the country's electric grid. Directed to return to France, he was arrested and convicted on terrorism charges. He joined Achamlane's group immediately on his release from prison.

When Brigitte was arrested in 2012, a cache of weapons, including AK-47s, was found in his house. He also had a list of addresses of Jewish-owned stores and detailed plans for the kidnap of a Jewish judge. In a grainy video of one of its Paris demonstrations, demonstrators march through the streets loudly yelling "*Mort aux juifs*," death to the Jews. A bystander is heard commenting, "it has been a while since we have heard that in Paris." (That video is no longer available.)

After the group was banned in 2012, many of its members went to Syria. Among them was Emilie Koenig, a female convert who became infamous for parading around with AK-47s and ended up on the U.N. Security Council's Sanctions Committee list (QD1,340). At the time of this writing she is in a Kurdish prison.

Choudary lost his media access in the United Kingdom after his group was banned but elsewhere in Europe he could still get on TV. In May 2012, Choudary attended a public launch of "Sharia4Holland" in Amsterdam. A few months later he went to Oslo to attend the founding of a Norwegian branch, "*Profetens Ummah*" (The Prophet's Ummah). On both occasions he parlayed these visits into TV interviews and press coverage. Danish TV too gave him a platform. In the U.S., FOX News too put him on. Sean Hannity put Choudary on his show several times in 2014 and 2015 as a "commentator" after terrorist incidents in Europe. Choudary's reprehensible portrayals of Islam and Muslim identity were a perfect foil for the American right-wing.

Members of the Dutch network, centered on Sharia4Holland and a Flemish-language website, *Shaam al-Ghareeba*, soon made themselves noticed in Amsterdam. In one typical stunt, in December 2011, members of *al-Muhajiroun* interrupted a public meeting in a popular Amsterdam venue that was hosting Irshad Manji, a Canadian Muslim feminist and gay rights activist. Profiting from the hourly departures of Eurostar trains, gangs of British and Belgian activists turned up.[64] Calling for the rule of sharia law, they set off a brawl and brought the meeting to an end.

Danish and Norwegian affiliates also sprang up in 2010 and 2011. Again, the leadership figures had long ties to Choudary, to *al-Muhajiroun*, and to the Londonistan milieu. Several of the Danish activists first came to notice in 2003, when they attended a summer camp for youths at the Finsbury Park Mosque. The Danish affiliate, *Kaldet til Islam* (The Call to Islam), availed itself of the legally protected right of political groups to exhibit their own election posters and they put up do-not-vote posters in Copenhagen. TV stations started to interview them as if they were legitimate candidates, asking them to explain their views to bewildered viewers. Telling Muslims they are not allowed to vote because it is "forbidden" in Islam is a typical *al-Muhajiroun* tactic. It gave them a chance to preach and to rile up people. *Shirk* is the sin of practicing idolatry or polytheism. Democracy is forbidden,

and therefore voting is *shirk*. It was a brilliant propaganda ploy because it made the jihadists look like a legitimate—if annoying—group with a genuinely political, if eccentric, objection to liberal democracy. At the same time, the campaign might shame Muslim voters who perhaps already had lukewarm feelings about their ability to influence politics through the ballot box.

Across the narrow strait between Copenhagen and southern Sweden, a sister organization emerged. It would outpace all the other Scandinavian groups in numbers and dedication to the fight. One hundred and fifty ISIS fighters came from the Angered district and the adjacent neighborhood in Gothenburg, a midsized Swedish city with a population of about 500,000.

In Germany, Choudary roped in several groups that had been independently founded. The principal German network is centered on a group of preachers who together created an organization known as *Die Wahre Religion* (The True Religion) and Vogel's *Einladung zum Paradies* (Invitation to Paradise).[65] Vogel and Abou-Nagie mirrored Choudary's confrontational style. Vogel's group was known for its aggressive mission work and handing out of copies of the Koran on the streets of German cities. Abou-Nagie was charged with incitement to religious hatred in connection with anti-Semitic statements in 2011 but was released by court order in 2012. In 2013, he was convicted of welfare benefit fraud. Two other preachers in the group, Sven Lau (Abou Adam) and Marcel Krass (Abu Yunus), were also converts. Lau was involved with Einladung zum Paradies, and probably started in 2007 with Muhamed Seyfudin Çiftçi (Abu Anes), a German-born salafist of Turkish descent. Lau was arrested in May 2014 but Krauss took the Koran-distribution project to the streets of Paris and to Leicester in the English Midlands. Another allied group, *Dawa* FF, pretended to be a soccer club, probably to get support from the generous subsidies offered by German local authorities to sports clubs and other civic groups. It was in fact a recruitment center, and it was banned in March 2013.

Die Wahre Religion was, at some point, estimated to have 500 followers, many of whom eventually went to Syria. The group stimulated counter-mobilization by the far right, just as Anjem Choudary's troops brought out the English Defense League to protest against their demonstrations in English towns and cities outside London. *Die Wahre Religion* provoked public anger when it started a campaign to put a copy of the Koran in German translation in every household in the country. Abou-Nagie also railed against homosexuality

and called for the stoning of gay people. The group was involved in a violent counterdemonstration in Cologne in 2014. Far-right hooligans associated with soccer clubs turned out in the thousands, supposedly to protect Germany against Muslim extremism.[66] *Die Wahre Religion* was banned in 2016.

Some of the German militants joined a militia group in Syria, *Millatu Ibrahim* ("The Religious Community of Ibrahim"), which had been established by Mohamed Shawqi Mahmoud, a twenty-nine-year-old Austrian who used the alias "Abu Usama al-Gharib." Mahmoud had a long history of working for Al Qaeda. As a teenager, he studied at the Islamic Cultural Institute in Milan, Italy, which at that time was still a meeting place for Al Qaeda's representatives. He went to Iraq in 2002, where he joined Ansar al-Islam, a precursor to Al Qaeda in Iraq. In 2006, back in Austria, he set up an Al Qaeda-sponsored website and online publication house, Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). In 2007, he and his wife—also an Al Qaeda activist—were arrested in Austria and convicted on a series of terrorism-related charges. Released from prison in Austria in 2011, Mahmoud moved to Germany where he set up a chapter of *Millatu Ibrahim,* at first in order to provide support to Abou-Nagie's controversial street demonstrations of aggressive piety. (The German authorities banned the group in 2012.)

Threatened with deportation from Germany back to Austria, Mahmoud moved first to Libya where he reconstituted *Millatu Ibrahim*, and then went on to Egypt, taking as many as fifty German followers with him. A few months later, after some members of the group were killed in the Sinai by Egyptian forces, they relocated *en masse* to Syria. In March 2013, Turkish authorities arrested Mahmoud at the border with Syria but later released him. He joined the service of the Islamic State, and featured in several executions posted on social media, including one in Palmyra of two captured Syrian soldiers. Mahmoud is believed to have been killed in an airstrike in November 2018.

During his time in Berlin, Mahmoud formed a partnership with Denis Cuspert, the former rapper known as Deso Dogg. Cuspert became one of the Islamic State's biggest social media celebrities. He left Germany in 2012 and moved first to Egypt, and then on to Syria. In 2014, Cuspert swore allegiance to the Islamic State. Working under the aliases of Abou Maleeq and Abu Talha Al Almani, he took command of the German brigade in Syria while using his skills as a rapper to produce *nasheed*, a type of chanting that

sounds like rap music but is considered religiously permissible by the jihadists. A handsome man, Cuspert presented a potent image of warrior masculinity. His productions used memes from rap culture and online gaming to proclaim that fighting—and dying—for the cause is the epitome of manliness.

In a video, Cuspert once explained how he and his followers ended up in Syria: "We wanted to go to Mali, but the route from Libya to Mali was closed. And we decided to go to Syria; we performed *Salat al-Istikharah* [prayers to ask God's help], and then went to Syria."[67] Did his group really want to go to Mali? In any case, he stuck with *Jabhat al-Nusra* for several months after the split between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, but in a later Facebook posting he announced that he had joined ISIS. This allowed him to have things both ways: distancing himself from the "*fitna*" between ISIS and Al Qaeda, and pronouncing himself in favor of unity. Cuspert died in January 2018 during intense fighting in Deir ez-Zor.

As a result of the outreach done by Choudary and his colleagues, and the shift to street-level organization away from mosques and the metropolitan cities, the jihadist footprint is now found across the European map. The diffusion makes effective counterterrorism much harder. Neighborhood-level recruitment networks operated in provincial cities across Europe (see Figure 11.2.). Two dozen ISIS volunteers killed in action came from one small French town, Lunel, near Montpellier.[68] We do not yet know the final tally of dead fighters, so the number has to be treated with caution. It could be higher. Other medium- and small-sized cities and towns similarly affected by contagious community-level recruitment include the Oslo suburb of Bærum, Cardiff, Gothenburg, Leverkusen near Cologne, and Luton, a town in commuter distance to London, to mention a few examples. A similar pattern of highly localized recruitment around charismatic preachers and neighborhood-level groups that are networked with the fighter groups based in insurgency "hot zones" has been documented in some parts of North Africa, notably Tunisia.[69]

Jewish targets

The populist European jihadist groups tailored their rhetoric to local concerns and amped up the hate-fueled public presentation of jihadism. They put the Culture War front and center. Anti-Semitism and homophobia appealed to the young men, often with previous histories of gang affiliation

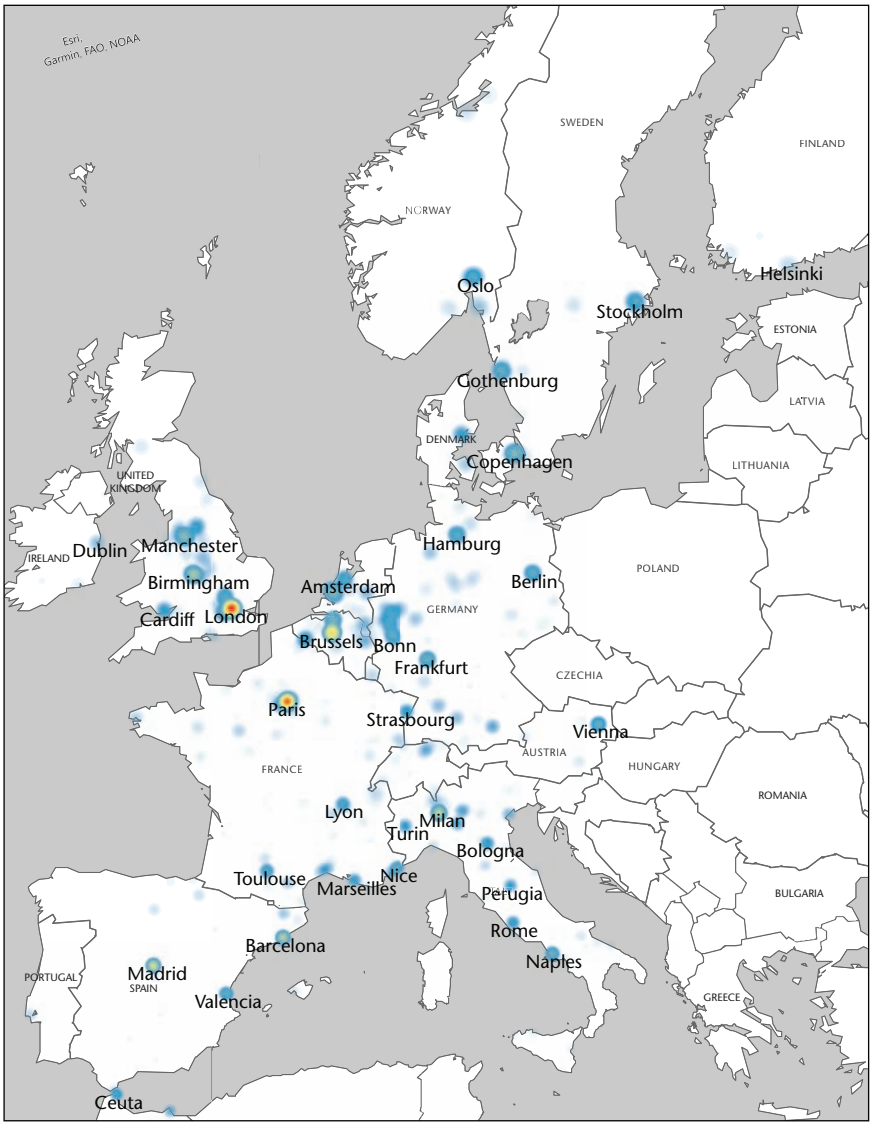

Figure 11.2. Density map of Europe, 1990–2019
Density map showing the hometowns of "homegrown" European terrorism offenders and foreign fighters.
N: 4,558. Western Europeans who committed terrorism offenses, died in the pursuit of such offenses, have outstanding warrants, or are known to have traveled to jihadist training camps or insurgent zones, 1990–2019.
Source: The Western Jihadism Project. Map created by Rosanne Libretti with ArcGIS Pro.

and petty criminality, at whom the propaganda was primarily directed. All this made a striking contrast to the comparatively highbrow rhetoric that had been favored by Al Qaeda just ten years earlier. Hyperactive online, the new breed of propagandists copied shock jock methods that captured media attention. They also broke with tradition by including women in the organization. At demonstrations, segregated groups of women in full black veiling, sometimes wearing head bands with slogans, and carrying posters with provocative content, made themselves seen and heard. Marriages—often polygamous—were part of the groups' attractions.

Anti-Semitic rants and threats backed up by efforts to bomb Jewish targets or kill Jews became a hallmark of the new populist agitators. The emir of Sharia4Belgium, Fouad Belkacem, was arrested and sent to prison for his anti-Semitic diatribes. His cell plotted to attack a NATO base, and a packed soccer stadium, but also unspecified Jewish targets. In 2011, a husband-and-wife team was arrested and accused of planning to bomb a Jewish community center in Manchester. They had been radicalized by a local branch of *al-Muhajiroun*. Synagogues were targeted in Oslo and Copenhagen by gangsta-jihadists who had one foot in the gangs and the other in Anjem Choudary's affiliates. Al Qaeda and the North African jihadist groups shared a liking for attacks on Jewish targets. The MIJM, an offspring of the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group, which was an Al Qaeda creation, carried out a series of attacks in Casablanca in 1995 targeting the local Jewish population. The GIA set off a car bomb outside a Jewish school in Lyon in 1995. The Mumbai attacks in 2008 targeted a famous hotel, a railroad station, and a Jewish community center.

In 2014, a group was arrested in Lyon for plotting to attack a conference on anti-Semitism. All of the perpetrators had been in contact with the new gangsta-style jihadist pop culture and the networks involved in street proselytizing and recruitment.

In the second half of 2014, stabbings and vehicular attacks occurred in Australia and Canada. In these cases, the perpetrators, inspired by ISIS, apparently undertook domestic attacks because they could not find their way to the jihadist homeland. In Queens, New York, a man attacked two NYPD officers on the street with a hatchet. A new pattern of true "lone wolf" attackers was now established. These loners worked from a target list posted on the internet.

And, everywhere, Jewish targets kept cropping up. Amedy Coulibaly, who took part in the January 2015 attacks in Paris, picked a kosher supermarket as his personal target. He, too, was a *Forsane Alizza* recruit.

In February 2015, a gunman fired on an event in Copenhagen related to cartoons of the Muslim prophet published in a Danish newspaper. He killed a member of the audience and went on to shoot and kill a guard at a *bat mitvah* party at a nearby synagogue. The twenty-two-year-old gunman had been radicalized either in prison or on the streets by contacts belonging to the Danish affiliate of Choudary's European network. He had sworn allegiance to ISIS just before the attacks.

A wave of incidents that followed was tied to ISIS influencers who groomed their followers over social media. These included a shooting attack against another Muhammed-cartoon-related event in Garland, Texas, carried out by men who had never been to Syria but were groomed by a member of "The Beatles" gang, Junaid Hussein, who operated from the Islamic State under the name of Abu Hussain al-Britani.

A Spanish group, the Islamic Fraternity for Preaching Jihad, which also recruited volunteers for ISIS, was rounded up in Barcelona. Its members were plotting to bomb Jewish bookstores and synagogues. (They had also planned to kidnap and behead a government official.) In June 2015, militants from ISIS's North African affiliate who had been to the "caliphate" carried out an attack on tourists in a hotel in Tunisia. Another North African affiliate that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State bombed the Italian embassy in Cairo. A few months later, it took responsibility for bombing a flight between Cairo and St. Petersburg, downing the plane and killing all on board. A man attacked a train between Brussels and Paris, but did not manage to kill anyone. Then came the attacks in Paris in November 2015. In December, there followed the shooting attack in San Bernardino. The couple responsible dedicated their act to ISIS, but there is no evidence that ISIS had an operational role in the attack.

Several mass casualty attacks in 2016 were attributed to ISIS. In March, there were three coordinated suicide bombings in Brussels. The perpetrators were associates of the network responsible for the attacks four months earlier in Paris. In June 2016, three men were arrested in Düsseldorf in connection to a foiled plot organized by the Islamic State that was supposed to replicate the attacks in Paris the previous November. The plot, which was supposed to have been carried out by ten men, traveling separately to Germany from Syria. It was stopped because one of the participants turned himself in to the French police.[70]

Then came the deadly truck attacks in Nice and in Berlin (see Textbox 11.1.). The incidents are often portrayed as the work of "lone wolves" but

Textbox 11.1. When truck attacks are not the result of "lone wolf" terrorism.

Nice, July 2016: 86 people died on July 14, 2016, near midnight, just after the fireworks celebrating Bastille Day had ended, when a local man, Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, drove a nineteen-ton truck down the *Promenade des Anglais* into a crowd of about 100,000 gathered on the Nice waterfront. The truck was stopped five minutes into the attack when local police shot and killed Bouhlel. CCTV footage later showed that he had taken the truck for test drives down the promenade in the days before the attack. The truck was unsafe and oversized, and should not have been allowed on the promenade, neither for the test drives nor on the day of the attack.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility, but French authorities initially rejected the idea of a larger conspiracy and described Bouhlel as having radicalized "very quickly." The assessment may have been based on reports that the attacker was a prolific user of drugs and steroids, and had used gay dating apps.[71] These activities are forbidden to Muslims, but sinners may actually be motivated to undertake suicide missions, since they are assured that martyrdom is a sure ticket to heaven and to forgiveness of all sins.

There is no evidence that Bouhlel had ever been to the Islamic State, but he did have collaborators. Some dozen people were arrested in connection with the attack. Bouhlel's phone records showed that he had been in touch with at least one co-conspirator since the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting attack in January 2015, a year and a half before the Bastille Day attack. In a text message, Bouhlel wrote, "I am not Charlie," a reference to the chants of "I am Charlie" at the demonstrations in France which expressed solidarity with the victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. Bouhlel expressed his satisfaction that "they" sent in "the soldiers of Allah to finish the job."[72] After a lengthy investigation, the French counterterrorism court issued a formal warrant of arrest in June 2020 against nine people in connection with the Nice attack.[73]

The trial is expected to take place in 2021. The attack may have been linked to a shadowy network of French-Tunisians with connections to an Islamic State group in Tunisia that has been implicated in a number of attacks in Europe and in Tunisia.

Berlin, December 2016: 11 people died on December 19, 2016, when Anis Amri, a Tunisian man whose asylum application had been turned down, drove into a crowd gathered at one of Berlin's open-air Christmas markets.

The truck was hijacked, and the original driver was found dead in the front seat with a stab wound and a bullet in the head. The Islamic State took responsibility and released a video of Amri pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Amri got away but he was shot and killed four days later in a confrontation with police in Milan. He had a long criminal record. His family says he used drugs and alcohol. He had been arrested several times in Tunisia before coming to Europe. (An autopsy after Amri's death indicated continued drug use.)

He arrived in Europe in 2011 on an inflatable raft carrying refugees that landed on the Italian island of Lampedusa. Amri pretended to be a minor and was sent to a refugee detention center. Here he participated in a violent riot and was sent to prison in Italy for four years. In 2015 he went to Germany, where he was associated with an extremist network run by an Iraqi preacher, Abu Walaa. He applied for refugee status in several German states, using as many as fourteen different identities. (Abu Walaa, whose real name is Ahmad Abdulaziz Abdullah, came to Germany in 2001. It is alleged that he belonged to *Ansar al-Islam*, a Kurdish terrorist group with followers in Italy and Germany. He lived in Norway until March 2020, when he was extradited to stand trial in Italy in connection with the now defunct group.[74])

In Berlin, Amri attended the Fussilet Mosque, another controversial mosque suspected of recruiting for the Islamic State, that was shut down in 2017. The German federal police were monitoring Amri at the time of the attack in December 2016. Five members of the Abu Walaa network had been arrested six weeks earlier on charges related to recruiting for the Islamic State. One of the arrested men told the police that Abu Walaa was the top recruiter for the Islamic State in Germany. German prosecutors say that Amri had planned to join the Islamic State in Syria but because of his legal situation he was unable to leave Germany.[75]

Initial arrests were made in Berlin of three men but the involvement of a wider network linked to the Islamic State was uncovered only in March 2018, when five Tunisians were arrested in Italy in connection with the Christmas market attack.[76] In May 2019, a trial against two of Amri's co-conspirators got under way. The men had stockpiled TATP and explosives in preparation for bombing a Berlin shopping center.[77] In June 2020, the Italian authorities expelled a certain Montassar Yaakoubi to Tunisia on grounds of national security. Amri had lived with Yaakoubi before he went to Germany in 2015.

(*Continued*)

Textbox 11.1. Continued

Manchester, May 2017: twenty-three people were killed and 800 injured when Salman Ramadan Abedi, a twenty-two-year-old local man whose family lives in Libya, detonated a suicide vest at a concert in Manchester attended by a largely teenage audience. Abedi was a local man, but he had help from an ISIS-affiliate in Libya. Once again, the Libyan affiliate emerged as a threat in Europe.

even where the attack was conducted by one man in the driver's seat of a truck, or on the rampage with a knife or a gun, there was, almost always, a network of facilitators behind him.

The years 2016 and 2017 also saw a large number of foiled and small-scale attacks inspired by the Islamic State. They are too many to list, but the following examples are fairly typical. In July 2016, two men who had pledged allegiance to al-Baghdadi attacked a church in Normandy during mass and took six people hostage. They executed an eighty-six-year-old priest at the altar. One of the men wore a fake suicide vest during the attack. This proved to be part of a new script. One assumption is that the fake vest is supposed to ensure that the police will shoot and kill the perpetrator, guaranteeing martyrdom. In this case, the police shot both men. A foiled attack in Denmark involved a sixteen-year-old Danish girl who was arrested for planning to set off bombs at two Jewish schools. She had never been to Syria and was not directed by Islamic State handlers. Local influencers tied to the trans-European Anjem Choudary network instigated her plot. In 2017, a Birmingham couple and other family members were arrested when they were found to be preparing a combined knife and bombing attack on, among other targets, Birmingham's central synagogue. They too were inspired by videos and propaganda from ISIS and egged on by local neighborhood-level activists from Choudary's organization.

There followed attacks in London, Stockholm, and Barcelona that were motivated by the ISIS script but did not, it would seem, involve returnees from the "caliphate." In June, an attack on London Bridge resulted in eleven deaths. Three veteran members of the London milieu carried it out. Khuram Butt first came to public attention in 2013 as a member of a group of vigilantes who formed "Shariah patrols," harassing people who were drinking, and Muslim women for not dressing appropriately. The "patrols" were an *al-Muhajiroun* project, and Butt had

been associated with Choudary and his group. However, Butt and his co-conspirators had been dormant for some time. Butt's family had confiscated his passport to prevent him from traveling to Syria to join ISIS. It is possible that because the men could not travel abroad, they decided to act locally in solidarity with ISIS.[78]

In September, an eighteen-year-old set off an IED at Parsons Green station on the London Underground. There were no casualties but Ahmed Hassan, an Iraqi asylum seeker, was sentenced to life imprisonment for attempted murder. Six other men were arrested but released in connection with the incident. Hassan arrived in the United Kingdom in 2015, claiming to be a minor. It was discovered during the trial he had lied about his age.[79]

No attacks on the scale of the previous years occurred in 2018 and 2019 but a steady drumbeat of sporadic knife and vehicular attacks continued. Six more such stabbings and shootings occurred in 2020, including two attacks targeting the former office of *Charlie Hebdo* and the murder of a French teacher who had discussed the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons in his class.

The Brussels vortex

Brussels, the capital of the European Union, is also a contender for the title of Europe's jihadi capital.[80] One district within the city, Molenbeek, was home to a plurality of the Belgian travelers to Syria and Iraq. Occupying 2.274 square miles in the center of Brussels, Molenbeek is a neighborhood with cafes, tourists, old apartment building, immigrant-origin families, hipsters, artists, and urban subcultures. It was home to the infamous French-Belgian network responsible for the attacks in Paris in November 2015 and the suicide attacks in Brussels in March 2016.[81] The same network was responsible for a long list of other, lesser-known plots, some of which were foiled.

"The Islamic State of Molenbeek" ran a headline on *The New York Times*' opinion pages. The Op-Ed went on to describe Molenbeek as "the most acute manifestation of a European failure" to integrate Muslims.[82] Belgium's ineffectual judicial system certainly has a lot to account for when it comes to the country's failure to control extremism, but Belgium's immigration policies were not solely responsible for the massive jihadist network that established itself in two districts of Brussels.

Molenbeek, is located in the shadows of the towering administrative offices of the European Union, and does not really deserve its notoriety.

However, it is remarkable, and chilling, that the operatives who planned the attacks in Paris were sheltered here by family and friends while they made their preparations—and then those who lived to fight another day were able to return and find refuge there.

The basic parameters of the attacks are well-known. Less well-known is that the social organization behind the attacks dated back to Al Qaeda's hub in Brussels in the 1990s. The attacks in Paris on November 13, 2015, involved serial commando-style operations by coordinated teams of attackers who targeted, in quick succession, a concert at the Bataclan theater and restaurants in the Marais, and two suicide attacks at a packed soccer stadium. Subsequent attacks in Brussels on March 22, 2016, carried out by the same network, targeted the airport and a metro station near the European Union headquarters. Terrorist impact is often measured in casualties and in this respect the scope of the attacks was significant: 130 killed in Paris and 32 in Brussels. Grievous harm was done to many hundreds more.

The scope of this attack network was far larger than anything seen before in Europe. Multiple micro-networks merged into one cohesive organization. The term "homegrown" terrorism fails to capture the origin and the breadth and spread of networks like this. Several of the key operatives grew up in Brussels, where they spent much of their youth in gangs as they gravitated to extremism. But the network also included young men from small towns and midsized cities elsewhere in Europe including France, as well as Syrians and Iraqis who never set foot in Europe before they converged on Paris, under orders from their ISIS handlers.

The Molenbeek network behind the attacks was responsible for a total of eleven violent plots, of which six were successful. These included a series of incidents both before and after the attacks in Paris and in Brussels. The network was implicated in the 2014 shooting at the Jewish Museum in Brussels and the January 2015 attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and a Jewish supermarket. The man responsible for a botched attempt to shoot up a high-speed train between Brussels and Paris was also a member. A number of foiled plots were also part of the plans. One was to kidnap a Belgian policeman and execute him. This was to be filmed for a YouTube production. A suicide attack on the La Defense district in Paris was scheduled to take place right after the November 13 attacks. It is thought that there was a plan to attack Schiphol Airport near Amsterdam, but details are scarce, and it is uncertain how realistic it was.

Two Belgium-based groups were particularly important in facilitating migration to the Islamic State. One was the Brussels-based Zerkani network, named after Khalid Zerkani, a forty-two-year-old street preacher from Morocco.[83] Another was the now banned Sharia4Belgium, an offshoot of the British preacher Anjem Choudary's empire of similarly named organizations. It was a mix of francophone Belgians and Frenchmen who had moved to Brussels or were just passing through, and also drew members from the French group, *Forsane Alizza*.

The demarcation lines between street gangs and militant politicized organizations were fuzzy. One-fifth of the travelers to the Islamic State from Brussels captured by our data collection were known to have a criminal history before they became involved in political extremism. In Molenbeek, the figure jumped to 33%. Three other surrounding municipalities—Anderlecht, Schaerbeek, and Laeken—were home to 16% of recruits with criminal records.

Fouad Belkacem, the leader of Sharia4Belgium, was a drug smuggler who became a street evangelist for violent *jihad*. Another organization, named *Resto du Tawhid* after the café where the members met, was led by a convert, Jean-Louis Denis. The charismatic leaders divided the turf between them, just like gang leaders.

Jean-Louis Denis initially operated on behalf of Belkacem and Sharia4Belgium, but he later began to recruit members for a group led by Khalid Zerkani.[84] He recruited followers from a school in Vilvoorde, a Flemish part of Belgium, where he had been sent by the public employment agency to get a job.[85] The young recruits were sent on to Syria, where many were killed.

The Zerkani network operated secretively and appealed primarily to men with little or no Islamic background, who were unemployed or had a history of criminality.[86] Investigations carried out in the aftermath of the Paris and Brussels attacks proved that this network formed the crux of the crime-terror nexus in Brussels.

The lieutenants of the Paris-Brussels attack network were all radicalized members of Zerkani's group: Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the two brothers Salah and Brahim Abdeslam, and Najim Laachraoui and Mohamed Abrini. Zerkani's nickname was "*Papa Noël*" (Father Christmas) because of the cash he doled out to his recruits as rewards and incentives. This network specialized in recruiting members of street gangs with a history of criminality, and repurposing their skills for the global struggle. Zerkani would encourage

neighborhood youth to steal from "unbelievers," asserting that the loot was *ghanimah* (the earned spoils of war).[87] This money would then be used to fund travel to Syria and to finance other organizational needs.

The network had ties to organized crime groups throughout Europe. There is evidence that it was by leveraging these mafia connections that Salah Abdeslam was able to travel freely through Europe in the summer of 2015 and obtain fake Italian documents (tied to his real name) as well as a pre-paid Italian credit card that he used until the Paris attacks.[88] The network's recruits tended to have a relatively easy time traveling to and from Syria undetected.[89] Sentenced in 2016, Zerkani is currently serving a fifteen-year sentence in Belgium on terrorism-related charges.

In 2017, a leaked Belgian police report showed that a quarter of the residents in the Molenbeek district were investigated for terrorism links in the aftermath of the terrorist atrocities in Paris and Brussels in 2015 and 2016. The police identified fifty-one organizations as having contacts to terrorism.

The Brussels network was a product of neighborhood effects. It depended on family ties, longstanding friendships, shared ethnic identity, and, often, a common history of criminality. Similar stories can be told about local neighborhood effects in Birmingham, Gothenburg, and other mid-sized cities and neighborhoods across Europe. In 2013, a police report noted for the first time that some of Birmingham's numerous organized crime gangs had been funding terrorism with the proceeds of criminal activities such as drug dealing, arms trafficking, and robbery.[90]

A single family in Molenbeek, the Aberkans, was at the center of many webs of local jihadis. The matriarch of the family, Fatima Aberkan, was first arrested on terrorism charges in early 2007, when she and her best friend and mentor, Malika El Aroud, were charged with plotting to break Nizar Trabelsi out of prison.[91] (Trabelsi and El Around were discussed in Chapter 5).

Fatima Aberkan (born 1951) became a female counterpart to Khalid Zerkani and a "den mother" for the entire Zerkani network. At least six of her children traveled to Syria to join ISIS. Fatima herself traveled to Syria many times, on at least one occasion bringing her two teenage daughters along with her.

Fatima is a relative of so many members of the Molenbeek jihadist network, including Salah Abdeslam, that keeping track is difficult. Her brother, Abdelhouaid, was one of the men involved in the Massoud assassination. Her sister, Naima, is also a convicted jihadist. One of her sons died fighting for ISIS. Another son was also convicted on terrorism charges in Belgium.

Her mother's house was used to hide Salah Abdeslam when he returned to Brussels after the November 2015 attacks.

A loaded suicide vest with Abdeslam's DNA was found in a dumpster in Paris after the attacks. He later admitted that at the last minute he decided not to go through with the planned suicide attack and ditched the vest in a trash bin.[92] Following the second attack he was eventually located in Molenbeek in an apartment that his friend, Abid Aberkan, had borrowed to hide him.

Fatima was best friends with Malika El-Aroud, who aside from all her other activities for the *jihad* was a digital pioneer. Her website *Minbar* SOS was among the first jihadist online recruitment sites. It was registered in Canada and had offshoots in the United States, France, and Italy.[93] El Around has been a Bin Laden loyalist since she went to Afghanistan with her first husband, the man who killed Ahmad Shah Massoud two days before the 9/11 attack.

In an interview with Paul Cruickshank, broadcast by CNN in 2006, El Aroud declared her love for Bin Laden while bustling around and serving tea and cake for the film crew: "Most Muslims love Osama. It was he who helped the oppressed. It was he who stood up against the biggest enemy in the world, the United States. We love him for that." She did not resent the fact that her husband killed himself on Bin Laden's orders. On the contrary, being a martyr's widow is "extraordinary."[94] In 2010, she was sentenced to eight years in prison for "creating, directing, and funding" a terrorist cell. She was stripped of her Belgian citizenship in 2017 and may now be deported to her native Morocco.[95]

French and Belgian fighters with ISIS had extensive ties with comrades back home and a large international fan base through their online social media networks. They also often came from multigenerational networks of foreign fighters. An example was Fabien Clain, a French national from the overseas department of Reunion and a convert to Islam. Clain was a mid-level ISIS operative. Together with his brother, Jean-Michel, Clain had deep ties to French jihadist milieus. Fabien provided the voice-over for ISIS's claim of responsibility for the November 13 attacks in Paris.

The Clain brothers belonged to the so-called Artigat network, a group of militants who were given religious instruction by Olivier Corel. Corel is a Syrian and his original name is Abdel Ilat Al-Dandachi. He ran an "Islamic commune" in a mountain village in southern France, where many French jihadists visited. He was also mentor to Mohamed Merah, the Toulouse

shooter from 2012, and to the Merah family.[96] Abdelkader Merah, an older brother, was part of the *la filière irakienne* (Brothers for Iraq) network, working on behalf of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Fabien Clain and Abdelkader Merah are thought to have traveled to Iraq and fought there with AQI.

Fabien Clain died in an airstrike in February 2019 in Baghouz, Syria. His brother, Jean-Michel, was killed by a drone strike in Syria in May 2019. Salah Abdeslam was sentenced to twenty years in prison in Belgium, and sent to stand trial in France. In March 2020, he and twenty other men were indicted on charges related to the November 2015 attacks.[97]

Don't blame the internet

Many of the people discussed in this book have spent an inordinate number of hours, days, and even years online.

Online communications have been an integral feature of how the global jihadist movement operates: spread the word, tell people what to do and how to do it, and make connections. They leverage local networks into a broader, transnational organization. And they give the rank-and-file something to do when they are otherwise unable to take part in the "struggle." But the internet is not the cause of the growth of the global networks or the reason "homegrown" terrorism exists.

For more than twenty years, Al Qaeda and other jihadist organizations maintained their own news agencies online. More outlets have been added, and online tactics have changed. However, the classic imprints are still in use. What has changed is the way in which the press releases, sermons, and official announcements are pushed out. For instance, in August 2018, ISIS used one of its established online news agencies, *al-Furqan Media*, to release an audio recording featuring Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The release came with a list of fourteen different online locations for followers to access. That same month, Al Qaeda's emir, Ayman al-Zawahiri, uploaded a video speech using Uptobox.com, a file-sharing platform that appeals to gamers and other online customers who wish to obscure identifying information.

A widely used tactic to foil surveillance is to program posts to self-destruct within a short time. An online cloud server popular with the jihadists, dropjiffy.com, automatically deletes all archived material after thirty days. When an announcement goes up, followers are alerted to download it. They are

simultaneously directed to cross-postings and backup servers. By the time the service providers or law enforcement agencies catch up with the new site and go through diplomatic channels to get the host country to order the provider to take it down, the content has already been distributed and the trail created by followers has disappeared.

Typically, messages go out on Telegram, a privately held encrypted messaging and file-sharing platform that was launched in 2013. Telegram is specifically designed to resist regulation and government surveillance.[98] Another tactic is to use host domains that are the online equivalent of ungoverned territories. An example is risala.ga. The.ga domain code is the country code for Internet Service Providers registered in Gabon, a tiny West African country. Tuvalu, a small nation in Micronesia, hosted the.tv domain, also a favorite for jihadist sites.

Gabon or Tuvalu, and the long list of similar domain providers, have two great advantages: they are cheap; and American or European authorities have no practical avenue for serving an order there to shut an account down or to solicit information that may led to prosecution. For similar reasons, Russian service providers are popular with the jihadists.

Tech giants are also active in this market. Facebook owns WhatsApp, a popular encrypted messaging app that can also be used for streaming. Earlier, YouTube and Facebook were a gift to terrorist recruiters who suddenly could trawl for recruits everywhere. Yet, the social reality of terrorist recruitment has always been more complex than the stereotyped image of teenagers being radicalized as they surf the internet from their bedrooms. And given the growth of encrypted messaging apps and file-sharing platforms designed to evade regulation by authorities, the suppression of jihadist sites on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook is not a big win in the fight against jihadist terrorism.

Seamus Hughes, who served as a counterterrorism expert in the Obama administration and transitioned into academia, bluntly describes the obsession with internet radicalization as "overblown."[99] I agree. It is a fallacy to think that that because jihadists swamp the internet and are often betrayed through their online activities, the internet is also where they live and train for violence. Radicalization and recruitment occur within an integrated loop formed by real-life local and global—"glocal"—social networks, Salafi-jihadist hubs, and insurgent fighter groups.[100] The growth of terrorist jihadist extremism is best explained by a simple axiom: to become a terrorist you have to know one. You can meet and flirt online, but true love is only to be found in real life.

What do they do when they join?

The Islamic State's open-door policy goes a long way to explain the number of Western volunteers to *'dawla*. Anybody could go. Teenagers, the unfit, criminals on the run, men looking for wives and women looking for husbands, even children without parents were welcome in the new society. It was sold as a colonization project. Not war. It became war, but that was not advertised in 2014. France saw a doubling of the number of people who left the country for the "caliphate" over a six-month period in 2015, and a tripling or quadrupling of the number over a twelve-month period starting in 2014.

It was different back in the day when Al Qaeda was running the *jihad* alone. Bin Laden was notoriously choosy about who could join his organization. Al Qaeda in Iraq, the Islamic State's forerunner, refused many volunteers who turned up looking for sponsorship because they were too out of shape or spoke the wrong kind of Arabic—or no Arabic at all.

The involvement of women, who had not previously been seen as a security risk, posed a new headache for security agencies. How dangerous were they really? Young people who seemed to treat their sojourn as the equivalent of a jihadist "gap year" might well live to regret what they have done, but some might become dangerous when they went home again. And in many cases young Westerners who dream of joining terrorist organizations abroad are directed to "do something" at home.

To ascertain the impact of changing recruitment tactics we repeated the analysis described in Chapter 9, but broadened it to include Europeans, Australians, and Canadians. Given this larger dataset (N = 6,393), the data are scalable and could be sorted by the year in which the individuals were known to have first become involved with the jihadist movement. (The Americans who were analyzed previously, and who in many respects were found to differ from their European counterparts, are included in this larger study group. They comprise 11% of the total data set.)

The subjects were divided into three cohorts, one for people who radicalized and took action before or in 2001, a second from 2002 to 2011, and a third from 2012 through 2019. This last group covers the Syrian insurgency and its aftermath. The opportunities for Western residents to join the global movement varied significantly in each period. The question we set out to answer was whether the preferred roles selected by the recruits changed across the three periods. As it turned out, they did. The results are displayed in Tables 11.3–11.6. (The methodology was described in Chapter 9, and will not be recapitulated here).

Table 11.3. Binary logistic regression by action type without phase, 1990–2019 (all years).

All years	Nonviolent only (Fundraising, recruitment, preaching)	Violent domestic plots (No foreign fighting)	Foreign fighting (No violent domestic plots)	Both violent domestic plots and foreign fighting
Male	0.77 (0.10)	1.60 (0.19)[c]	0.59 (0.06)[c]	2.10 (0.39)[c]
Homegrown	0.56 (0.04)[c]	0.57 (0.04)[c]	2.30 (0.15)[c]	1.30 (0.12)[b]
Convert to Islam	0.75 (0.08)[b]	1.10 (0.09)	1.10 (0.08)	0.99 (0.11)
Age	1.10 (0.00)[c]	1.00 (0.00)[c]	0.94 (0.00)[c]	0.97 (0.01)[c]
Constant	0.08 (0.01)[c]	0.27 (0.05)[c]	2.50 (0.44)[c]	0.15 (0.04)[c]
Pseudo R^2	0.07	0.02	0.08	0.02

Key: a = p<0.05, b = p<0.01, c = p<0.001

N = 6393; 781 missing

Reporting odds ratios and significance, with standard error in parentheses. The constant indicates the baseline odds. Pseudo R^2 measures the total variability of the dependent variable in the equation around the mean. The lower the value, the better the fit.

Generally, as was the case with American recruits, homegrown jihadists, in contrast to immigrant-origin jihadists, overwhelmingly prefer to go abroad and fight as foreign fighters (2.4:1). This was true for the entire period, but the preference among homegrown jihadists for becoming a foreign fighter increased dramatically in the last period when compared with immigrant-origin jihadists (4.3:1). During the phase of "homegrown" terrorism, the odds ratio of going abroad to join a foreign terrorist organization and also carrying out a violent attack at home was very high (6.8:1) when compared with those who had stayed at home.

Converts had roughly even odds of choosing any of the four options: becoming a foreign fighter by joining a foreign terrorist organization and traveling to a training camp; carrying out a violent attack at home or in another Western country; undertaking foreign travel for the purpose of both gaining training in military *jihad* and a domestic attack; or supporting the global *jihad* through criminal but nonviolent means. However, at 0.7:1, the odds that someone who is a convert chooses to become a fundraiser or otherwise nonviolent supporter is depressed somewhat when compared against the choices of non-converts. Men consistently favored violent actions. Age had less of an impact on role choices than might be expected, but older recruits were more likely to undertake fundraising or other support activities.

Opportunities for joining a foreign terrorist organization were curtailed in the wake of 9/11, when Al Qaeda sought to reestablish training camps

Table 11.4. Binary logistic regression by action type for phase 1: 1990–2001 (inclusive).

Phase 1	Nonviolent only (Fundraising, recruitment, preaching)	Violent domestic plots (No foreign fighting)	Foreign fighting (No violent domestic plots)	Both violent domestic plots and foreign fighting
Male	0.80 (0.11)	1.70 (0.21)[c]	0.61 (0.06)[c]	1.70 (0.33)[b]
Homegrown	0.56 (0.05)[c]	0.53 (0.04)[c]	2.30 (0.17)[c]	1.80 (0.21)[c]
Convert to Islam	0.72 (0.08)[b]	1.20 (0.10)	1.07 (0.09)	0.99 (0.12)
Age	1.10 (0.01)[c]	1.00 (0.00)[c]	0.94 (0.00)[c]	0.96 (0.01)[c]
Phase 1 (all)	3.00 (0.52)	0.38 (0.46)	0.90 (0.83)	2.30 (2.90)
Interaction Effect				
Sex × Phase 1	0.57 (0.52)	1.10 (1.20)	0.91 (0.83)	1.10 (1.30)
Native × Phase 1	0.60 (0.18)	0.91 (0.21)	0.77 (0.16)	1.10 (0.25)
Convert × Phase 1	1.70 (0.70)	0.76 (0.27)	0.98 (0.30)	1.10 (0.34)
Age × Phase 1	0.98 (0.13)	1.00 (0.01)	1.00 (0.02)	1.00 (0.02)
Constant	0.07 (0.01)[c]	0.30 (0.05)[c]	2.49 (0.46)[c]	0.13 (0.04)[c]
Pseudo R^2	0.07	0.03	0.08	0.06

Key: a = p<0.05, b = p<0.01, c = p<0.001

N = 6393; 781 missing

Phase 1 N = 894; 2 missing

Reporting odds ratios and significance, with standard error in parentheses. The constant indicates the baseline odds. Pseudo R^2 measures the total variability of the dependent variable in the equation around the mean. The lower the value, the better the fit.

and secure new safe havens for its men. To ascertain the impact of changing recruitment tactics, we sorted the data by the year in which the militants first became involved with the jihadist movement. The most common groups that new recruits joined in those years were Al Qaeda's Yemen-based affiliate (AQAP), *al Shabaab*, and Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's forerunner to ISIS. These groups were for various reasons particularly selective about whom they allowed to join the organization and, in particular, about who was allowed to become a foreign fighter.

After the rise of ISIS, native-origin Western natural-born Muslims had the highest odds of becoming a foreign fighter. Immigrant-origin Western-based militants were much more likely to become violent domestic operatives. However, in contrast to the previous analysis, homegrown Muslims and converts were also likely to become nonviolent domestic operatives.

In sum, contrary to what is often assumed, there is solid evidence that homegrown jihadists overwhelmingly prefer to travel and to fight with a foreign terrorist organization. Attacking targets at home is not their first choice. Some are eager to get military training. (They often pay for the

Table 11.5. Binary logistic regression by action type for phase 2: 2002–2011 (inclusive).

Phase 2	Nonviolent only (Fundraising, recruitment, preaching)	Violent domestic plots (No foreign fighting)	Foreign fighting (No violent domestic plots)	Both violent domestic plots and foreign fighting
Male	0.83 (0.14)	1.80 (0.27)[c]	0.56 (0.07)[c]	2.20 (0.49)[c]
Homegrown	0.62 (0.06)[c]	0.57 (0.05)[c]	2.40 (0.19)[c]	0.78 (0.09)[a]
Convert to Islam	0.83 (0.11)	1.20 (0.12)	0.98 (0.09)	0.98 (0.14)
Age	1.07 (0.01)[c]	1.02 (0.01)[c]	0.94 (0.01)[c]	0.98 (0.01)[a]
Phase 2 (all)	3.88 (1.59)[b]	5.50 (2.00)[c]	0.09 (0.04)[c]	2.10 (1.20)
Interaction Effect				
Sex × Phase 2	0.69 (0.19)	0.59 (0.15)[a]	2.20 (0.63)[b]	0.72 (0.29)
Native × Phase 2	0.83 (0.13)	1.00 (0.14)	0.94 (0.15)	4.10 (0.83)[c]
Convert × Phase 2	0.82 (0.19)	1.10 (0.18)	1.10 (1.20)	1.10 (0.24)
Age × Phase 2	0.99 (0.01)	0.98 (0.01)[b]	1.00 (0.01)[a]	0.95 (0.01)[c]
Constant	0.05 (0.01)[c]	0.16 (0.03)[c]	4.10 (0.84)[c]	0.13 (0.04)[c]
Pseudo R^2	0.08	0.04	0.12	0.04

Key: a = p<0.05, b = p<0.01, c = p<0.001

N = 6393; 781 missing

Phase 2 N = 2268; 206 missing

Reporting odds ratios and significance, with standard error in parentheses. The constant indicates the baseline odds. Pseudo R^2 measures the total variability of the dependent variable in the equation around the mean. The lower the value, the better the fit.

privilege, in cash.) When ISIS opened its doors, they streamed abroad. Above all, they want to be part of the global scene. Exactly where often matters little. This finding has broad significance for our understanding of why and how Western followers of jihadist movements become mobilized and join up.

The ISIS recruitment wave dramatically increased the size of the radicalized population in Europe. Intelligence and police officials are rightly concerned. Estimates of the number of returnees vary, but experts agree that the risk posed is significant.[101] Not all of the returnees come back as hardened extremists, but experience from previous migrations between Europe and jihadist insurgencies suggests that many will return to form a cadre around whom new recruits will congregate. Their personal, real-life connections to comrades from the insurgent combat zones will become the pathways through which the networks regenerate and undertake further recruitment. Porous borders and Europe's proximity to jihadist strongholds in Syria, Yemen, and North Africa are a further risk factor.

Table 11.6. Binary logistic regression by action type for phase 3: 2012–2019 (inclusive).

Phase 3	Nonviolent only (Fundraising, recruitment, preaching)	Violent domestic plots (No foreign fighting)	Foreign fighting (No violent domestic plots)	Both violent domestic plots and foreign fighting
Male	0.52 (0.11)[b]	0.93 (0.19)	1.30 (0.32)	2.00 (0.60)[a]
Homegrown	0.53 (0.06)[c]	0.65 (0.06)[c]	1.80 (0.19)[c]	1.90 (0.22)[c]
Convert to Islam	0.73 (0.12)	1.10 (0.15)	1.10 (0.15)	1.10 (0.16)
Age	1.10 (0.01)[c]	1.00 (0.01)	0.96 (0.01)[c]	0.95 (0.01)[c]
Phase 3 (all)	0.18 (0.07)[c]	0.26 (0.09)[c]	9.10 (3.70)[c]	0.45 (0.25)
Interaction Effect				
Sex × Phase 3	1.60 (0.44)	2.00 (0.51)[b]	0.49 (0.14)[a]	0.73 (0.28)
Native × Phase 3	1.40 (0.24)[a]	0.82 (0.11)	1.09 (0.15)	0.51 (0.10)[c]
Convert × Phase 3	1.10 (0.25)	1.00 (0.17)	0.89 (0.15)	0.95 (0.22)
Age × Phase 3	1.00 (0.01)[a]	1.00 (0.01)[a]	0.98 (0.01)	1.00 (0.01)
Constant	0.19 (0.06)[c]	0.64 (0.70)	0.51 (0.18)	0.26 (0.11)[c]
Pseudo R^2	0.07	0.03	0.13	0.05

Key: a = p<0.05, b = p<0.01, c = p<0.001

N = 6393; 781 missing

Phase 3 N = 3231; 573 missing

Reporting odds ratios and significance, with standard error in parentheses. The constant indicates the baseline odds. Pseudo R^2 measures the total variability of the dependent variable in the equation around the mean. The lower the value, the better the fit.

Surviving preachers and organizers from the halcyon days of Al Qaeda's European networks before the 9/11 attacks are often found at the core of today's tangled networks. But the local hubs are joined together by multiple overlapping social connections. They bring in brothers and cousins, members of street gangs, school friends, and neighbors.[102] These clusters, in turn, are woven together by online and real-world networks that are sustained and amplified by the travels of members and animated by charismatic preachers, and organized by an online community of extremist networking. Getting terrorists off Facebook and Twitter is a small success but suppressing online recruitment on the popular social media sites will not degrade the real-life local hubs of jihadist extremists and the networks that linked them to the global movement.

Attacks and arrests declined across Europe as well as globally in 2018 and 2019, and continued in 2020. The impact of the pandemic on the terrorist business is still not known.[103] Yet, the structural underpinnings

for a jihadist comeback are still largely in place. Europe may be more at risk now than at any time since the 1990s.

The Western branch of the global jihadist movement is a localized expression of a global organization. It has its own culture and specific modes of expression, but it is essentially a "glocal" phenomenon. Without the global link, it would wither away. The strategies of the foreign terrorist groups largely determine recruitment patterns and role allocations for Western homegrown activists. The locals are soldiers in an army led by veteran immigrant-origin militants. In recent years, significant changes have taken place in both the leadership cadre and the recruitment patterns. It seems that the successes the movement booked in terms of growth and diffusion have costs. Chief among these are lack of coordination and declining control. Both are familiar problems in growth industries.

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12

The Never-Ending Forever War

As the war on terror moves into its third decade it has become what critics call the "forever war." The expression, alluding to a state of perpetual war with no prospect of success, provided the title of a prize-winning book, *The Forever War* (2009), by Dexter Filkins. The book was based on his experience covering U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq,[1] but he himself borrowed the title from a science fiction novel published in 1974, about an endless intergalactic war against an amorphous enemy. Opponents now use the "forever war" meme to sum up everything that is wrong with the West's fight-back against global jihadism. (Some of these critics are cited in Chapter 1.)

The criticisms are familiar. From torture to extrajudicial incarceration, the war on terror caused the United States to compromise foundational values. It has polluted our democracy and undermined civil liberties.[2] More and more personal information is collected and stored by the state. Files stolen by Edward Snowden from his employer, the National Security Agency (NSA), in 2013 and 2014 gave evidence of extensive government surveillance and data collection. The private sector knows all about our airline bookings, financial transactions, and phone and email communications, and may pass our records over to governments. Travelers are subjected to invasive scrutiny at airports. Facial recognition technology invades our privacy.

Then, there is the cost argument. The sacrifice of human lives and the outlay in tax dollars are obscenely out of proportion to the threat. Many more people have died fighting Al Qaeda than Al Qaeda has killed in the United States. The funds spent to wage war could be invested in aging trains and public construction projects.

The Costs of War project at Brown University identified eighty countries, 40% of the world's countries, as strategic locations in the war on terror. The federal price tag for the post-9/11 wars is estimated to be over 6.4 trillion dollars.[3] By way of comparison, in March 2021 President Joe Biden signed a 1.9 trillion dollars spending package in emergency funding to address the coronavirus pandemic. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that the economic disruption caused by the virus and the costs of legislation enacted to mitigate the fallout from the virus will cause a federal deficit of 3.3. trillion dollars in 2020, more than half of the estimated costs of the twenty-year long war on terror. One way to spin the numbers is to say that perhaps the war on terror wasn't so financially costly after all. A more relevant inference may be that, for sure, there will be less money available for fighting terrorism globally in the coming years.

The estimates provided by the Costs of War project may, however, be exaggerated. The eighty countries statistic listed as "strategic locations" include locations for training programs for local military or border security forces and also so-called "lily pads," operational support hubs hosted by allied nations as part of cooperative security agreements with the United States. These are permanent installations that can be scaled up as needed to provide assistance to local governments in the event of natural disasters and for action against drug traffickers—or, in some cases, terrorists.

The transition toward the hub model began in 2004 and developed further during the Obama administration. It is seen as an alternative to old-style bases, and represents a shift toward a smaller and more flexible deployment of American troops abroad and a strategic shift toward cooperative security. This would seem to be more or less in line with what critics of the "forever war" on terrorism would like to see. Even if you think—as I do—that the war on terror will remain a strategic imperative for the United States in future years, the paradigm shift to cooperative security and networked flexible global capabilities is an apt response to the jihadists' geographical diffusion and the blending of political and criminal networks.

The harsh reality is that the fight against global jihadist terrorism is indeed an endless war, or certainly a war that is unlikely to end anytime soon. The difficult question is not how to stop fighting the war on terror but how to continue fighting it. In the foreseeable future, neither a Republican nor a Democratic president will be able to reduce the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan or in Iraq to zero.

Oddly, what was initially called the Global War on Terror (with capital letters) was an improvisation that followed immediately on the shock of the 9/11 attacks. The post-Cold War strategy was to spread democracy rather than war. In 1989, as the Soviet Union was collapsing, Francis Fukuyama wrote in his book, *The End of History* (by which he did not literally mean that history stopped), that the war of ideologies was over:

> The twentieth century saw the developed world descend into a paroxysm of ideological violence, as liberalism contended first with the remnants of absolutism, then bolshevism and fascism, and finally an updated Marxism that threatened to lead to the ultimate apocalypse of nuclear war. But the century that began full of self-confidence in the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy seems at its close to be returning full circle to where it started: not to an "end of ideology" or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism."[4]

The "unabashed victory" needed a push. With the invasion of Iraq in 2003, promoting democracy and regime change became an integral part of the war on terror. President George W. Bush's second inaugural speech, in 2005, represented the apogee of liberal interventionism: "We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion: The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world."[5] The Cold War was over. There was a new front. Combating terrorism by promoting democracy became the next grand strategy.[6]

Two years later, the war in Iraq was exacting a terrible toll on the coalition troops. And it gave Al Qaeda a new lease on life. That war is now, even by some of its original supporters, seen as a tragic strategic mistake. But what is the takeaway? The conclusion is often drawn that the United States should not, ever again, engage in what critics label liberal interventionism to promote or stabilize democracy, or for humanitarian reasons.[7] The war in Iraq was launched by a Republican administration, but conservatives nevertheless came to see it as an example of such liberal interventionism. Liberals, meanwhile, see it as the imperial pipe dream of conservative hawks. Both sides agree it was a mistake.

The repeal of the 2001 and the 2002 congressional authorizations for the use of military force against Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's regime has become a rallying point for critics on the left and the right who wish to see an end to "forever wars." The 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force

(AUMF) remains the principal source of the U.S. government's legal authority to use military force against Al Qaeda and its immediate associates, on the battlefields of Afghanistan and far beyond.

What would repeal involve? Roughly, three positions can be identified. The first is to repeal and not replace both the 2001 and 2002 authorizations. The 2001 AUMF in particular is seen as a "blank check" for endless war, and its repeal as a necessary step toward the reordering of American priorities. Successive administrations have stretched the concept of "Al Qaeda" to make this AUMF a cover for waging war against groups that did not even exist when the authorization was passed.

Then there is the "repeal and replace" position. This argues for a narrower and updated authorization, covering the use of military force against specific, named groups. Its advocates recognize that there must be a statutory framework for the conduct of military operations that fall short of war against global terrorist movements.

Replacing the 2001 AUMF presents difficult choices. An emergent consensus among "repeal and replace" advocates is that a new authorization should refrain from focusing on Al Qaeda. (Advocates of a repeal generally think Al Qaeda is "over.") But if so, which groups might be included on the list as legitimate targets in a reworked AUMF? How would they be selected? And what role would secret information play in the determination? These are difficult questions. Should a new AUMF authorize the president to conduct strikes against Hezbollah or Hamas? What territorial restrictions should be added? Hezbollah is known to operate in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. Would a strike against Hezbollah outside the border regions of Iraq and Iran be okay? The aim may be to get away from the perception that the war on terror is conducted only against Muslims, but the adoption of more neutral language would broaden rather than narrow the president's right to conduct small-scale wars without scrutiny by Congress. Advocates of repeal and replace look to time limits and procedural restrictions to constrain the president's authority under a new AUMF. The use of "sunset" restrictions presumes that Congress or the House and Senate Intelligence Committees would renew authorization annually, or even every six months, with a minimum of delay and acrimony. That may not be realistic.

Even getting to a discussion of the replace and repeal option has proven difficult. In a speech in 2013 to the National Defense University, President Obama announced that he wanted to repeal the 2001 AUMF and put the

use of military force against ISIS and other similar future interventions against international jihadist terrorist on a different legal footing, perhaps making no distinction between Al Qaeda and other international terrorist groups. Obama sided with critics of the "forever war." Citing James Madison's observation that no nation can preserve its freedom while engaging in continual warfare, he acknowledged that stamping out international terrorism was not possible.[8] But then the Obama administration switched gears and argued that the 2001 AUMF provided authorization for war against ISIS, which could be seen as a successor organization of Al Qaeda. The reality of the jihadist expansion in Syria and Iraq got in the way of principles. Obama did not repeal the 2001 AUMF.

In December 2011, Obama announced the full withdrawal of American troops in Iraq. The final chapter of Bush's war in Iraq closed. Arguably, repealing the 2002 AUMF authorizing the war against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, should have followed. However, the war in Iraq ended and the 2002 AUMF was on the book as a "dead letter" law until the Trump administration found use for it.

Despite its promise to end "forever wars," the administration claimed broad authority to conduct discretionary war against terrorism. In December 2019, the U.S. government carried out a drone strike killing Qassim Soleimani, the general of Iran's Al Quds force, during his official visit in Iraq. The administration claimed that legal authority for the strike against Soleimani could be found in Article II of the Constitution, which authorizes the President to use military force to protect the nation against immediate threats. (No evidence was presented in support of the "immediate threat" argument.) Doubling up on the legal claims to unfettered presidential authority, the administration also claimed that the 2002 AUMF authorized the broader use of force in Iraq and was not limited to military action against Saddam Hussein's regime.[9] The Trump administration's reading came dangerously close to authorizing the president to conduct war at will against Iranian targets. It also muddied the distinction between the assassination of foreign leaders (which is prohibited by international and U.S. law) and targeted killings of Al Qaeda leaders who are known to be coordinating terrorist attacks against the United States (which is considered legal).

The U.S. government has not generally made public statements about the use of drones for targeted killings and it does not release statistics about targeted aerial attacks (aka drone attacks). At one point, reacting to congressional concerns that the CIA was using drone strikes to conduct a secret war, the Obama

administration issued a Presidential Policy Guidance notice and created a secret review committee in the White House that was responsible for reviewing and authorizing targeted killings. The guidance set limits on who could be targeted and established criteria for judging how closely a specific strike would be in conformity with the original intent of the 2001 AUMF. The revised process shifted responsibility for the use of drones in targeted killings, and brought in staff from the House and Senate intelligence committees on a monthly basis to review and monitor the use of drone strikes. In 2018, President Trump restored the CIA's authority to launch drone strikes without oversight from a civilian committee based in the White House, as called for under the Obama guidelines—much less Congressional oversight.

The efficacy and legality of targeted killings is hotly debated. Critics say drone strikes are contrary to international law, too often cause too many collateral deaths of bystanders, and are in any case ineffective. Degrading the leadership through targeted killings simply does not work because the jihadist groups have a deep bench of replacements when a leader is taken out. Defenders of the use of drones generally favor oversight along the lines introduced by the Obama administration and point out that civilian casualties are far fewer when drones are used compared to other types of air strikes or to the deployment of Special Forces.

The ability of drones to pick up electronic communications and pinpoint the geographical location of the top cadres has driven Al Qaeda's bosses to avoid internet-based communications and to rely on snail mail carried by couriers.[10] Complaints about missed mail and problems with coordination cropped up as a factor in the dispute between al-Zawahiri and Al Qaeda's top brass in the Syrian command structure in 2017. Al-Zawahiri was six weeks behind the latest news because he depended on couriers making the trek between Idlib province in Syria and wherever he was hiding in the Pakistani tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. When fear of drones keeps leaders huddled indoors, and as communications become slower and less reliable, the networks are degraded.

But critics of the AUMF who describe it as a "blank check" for presidential global warfare are at least half-right. Circumstances have changed. Repealing the two twenty-year old authorizations for war on terror and the now long gone regime of Saddam Hussein are necessary steps for moving on from the war on terror strategy that emerged, in haste, and with unforeseen consequences, after 9/11.

The critics are wrong, however, if they think the war on terror can be ended by a unilateral withdrawal from the global fight. The jihadists are still at war with the West. Containing global terrorism requires a steady hand and continuity from administration to administration. Putting the "war on terror" on a new legal basis is a necessity. Greater transparency and post hoc review by the House and Senate intelligence committees, which have a long record of bipartisanship, are good things to do. The war on terror does not and cannot belong to the president. One reason is that transparency is required to build alliances with allies, and to achieve consensus between Congress and the president about how the war is to be conducted. And the United States needs allies. The war on a global terrorist network cannot be won by going it alone. Strategic diplomacy, cooperative security, and a balanced approach to military engagement are as necessary as ever.

The next cycle

Al Qaeda is an aging organization. Reports that Ayman al-Zawahiri had died from natural causes started to circulate in November 2020, at the same time that news broke of the assassination of Abu Mohammad al-Masri in Teheran. Al-Zawahiri had been reported to be in ill health for some time, suffering from severe asthma. His death was first reported in the Pakistani media and was than broadcast on Twitter by Hassan Hassan, a well-informed American journalist.[11]

If these reports are accurate, Saif al-Adel may be the last remaining member of the original leadership cadre of al-Qaeda still in the fight. (He has for years been a fixture on the FBI's most wanted list for his role in the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.) At the time of this writing, unconfirmed reports are that Al-Adel is in northern Syria, where he is embedded with Hurras al-Din, an Al Qaeda affiliate.[12]

A change in leadership may lead to a reinvigorated new version of Al Qaeda or, alternatively, it may further weaken the central command's ability to provide direction for the far-flung global movement. A new leadership may make it easier for Al Qaeda and ISIS to reconcile. It may also be that a new central command for Al Qaeda will be happy to control a core organization of experienced fighters, fortified by the new generation of fighters from the civil war in Syria, but otherwise not change course.

The leadership of Al Qaeda is expert in making regional, perhaps temporary alliances with sympathetic and opportunistic governments.[13] Contacts with old friends have recently been reestablished. The Taliban is once again providing safe haven for Al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan. Regular consultations allegedly take place between Al Qaeda and the Haqqani network, a coalition of Afghan warlords headed by the Haqqani family that has had on and off friendly ties with Pakistan.[14] It has been reported that a meeting took place between al-Zawahiri and a high-level representative of the network in early 2020. (The U.S. Secretary of State designated the Haqqani Network a Foreign Terrorist Organization on September 7, 2012.[15])

A resurgent Afghan Taliban that considers itself ideologically obliged to provide safe haven to Al Qaeda's troops and a collaboration agreement with the Haqqani network mean that, once again, Al Qaeda has a safe haven in Afghanistan. (The Haqqani network is an organization of tribal warlords that operates in the border territory between Afghanistan and Pakistan.)

Managing generational change could be difficult for Al Qaeda but the impact of al-Zawahiri's death might already have been mitigated by the changes the organization has undergone in recent years. A new generation of veterans from the war in Syria have already ascended to leadership roles in Al Qaeda. The more serious issue may well be that this new generation is not well-known to the world (or to the Western intelligence community).

The Taliban is also undergoing a change of leadership: the son of the group's founder, the late Mullah Omar, is taking over. Despite the lockdown imposed by the pandemic, a Taliban delegation traveled to Pakistan in December 2020 to meet with, among others, the Pakistani Prime Minister, Imran Khan, and the foreign minister. The agenda was to set a schedule for negotiations leading to a political settlement in Afghanistan that will accommodate the Taliban.[16]

It took a deal between the United States and the Taliban to clear the road to the negotiating table in Islamabad. In March 2020, after eighteen years and six months of war, the Trump administration signed a peace agreement with the Taliban.[17] The decision to negotiate for peace followed the script advocated by Realists; grant the terrorist enemy control of their patch of land in exchange for giving up the broader struggle. A timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. forces was agreed upon, and—contingent on the Taliban's observance of the agreement—the withdrawal of all foreign

troops. The Taliban agreed to start talks with the Afghan government and guaranteed that Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups threatening the security of the United States and its allies would not be allowed to operate from Afghanistan. (This promise sets a low bar. In the past the U.S. demanded that the Taliban fully renounce Al Qaeda.) It is now known that both the Taliban and the Haqqani met at the same time with an Al Qaeda delegation.

Making peace with the Taliban made for a topsy-turvy world. In December 2020, the head of the U.S. Central Command, General Kenneth McKenzie Jr., confirmed that the U.S. military had conducted drone strikes in Afghanistan against fighter groups affiliated with ISIS to help the Taliban. Asked during his testimony to the House Armed Services Committee whether the Taliban had been provided with U.S. assistance, the McKenzie answered "there was very limited support from us—and I would characterize that as very limited support."[18] The idea that the U.S. military would assist the Taliban with taking control of its territory boggles the mind.

The peace plan abandoned American allies in Afghanistan; at all times a fraught alliance that required the United States to overlook endemic corruption and rampant election fraud. An investigation by U.S. Department of Defense accountants found the 40% of American aid to rebuilt Afghanistan ended up in the pockets of corrupt Afghan officials, crime syndicates, and even in the hands of the insurgent group that we were fighting.[19] These abuses helped build the case for a complete withdrawal. Another concern that could less easily be overlooked had to do with the Taliban's gender politics. Videos released by Afghan human rights' groups of the Taliban stoning women to death cannot easily be overlooked. U.S. negotiators made the protection of women's rights one of the conditions for peace but no one really believes that the Taliban has changed its mind about imposing draconian punishments for breaches of their moral code.

The most likely scenario—in my view—is that the Taliban will continue to observe norms (and political interests) that demand the extension of hospitality to fellow believers in the struggle in the path of Allah. The Taliban may expect that Al Qaeda will refrain from attacking the United States directly in the manner of Bin Laden and thereby provoke retaliatory military reaction that would jeopardize the Taliban's position in Afghanistan. Such a bargain might be attractive, for the time being, to Al Qaeda. The organization could then focus on consolidating its strongholds in Africa, on the Arabian Peninsula, and in Southeast Asia.

It is unlikely that the bargain will hold. Any compromise made to build alliances is "permissible," to use the terminology employed by the jihadist intellectuals, only so long as it serves the movement's long-term goal: the capture of "Rome," the figure of speech used by Abu Qatada and the jihadist public intellectuals to signify the West. Another reason is that Al Qaeda—even if by proxy—needs to attack the West to keep up recruitment and maintain status. What happens in Afghanistan still has repercussions for the national security of the United States and its allies. This is not because Afghanistan is itself a strategic concern but because—as the 9/11 Commission concluded—granting Al Qaeda a sanctuary constitutes a threat to the national security of the United States and its allies, at home and abroad. The global capabilities of Al Qaeda are greater today than they were in 2001. The chief concern is not another attack on the scale of the 9/11 attacks against the U.S. homeland. That specific scenario is no longer a realistic possibility, although U.S. military installations, embassies, and businesses and NGOs abroad will continue to be vulnerable to attack. But continuing jihadist insurgencies will destabilize fragile states, undermine struggling economies, provoke civil wars, precipitate state failures and refugee crises. And this will have a knock-on effect on neighboring states. That happened in Syria. It is happening now in parts of Africa. For the sake of their own security, Western powers cannot turn away from these challenges.

Jihadist groups are increasingly involved in destabilizing proxy wars. They represent a serious threat to political and economic stability across Asia and Africa, and, increasingly, in the Mediterranean region, which includes southern Europe and Israel. What can be said about their capabilities and goals?

Following the fall of the "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq, ISIS reverted to guerrilla tactics in Syria and Iraq.[20] It also claims, how realistically is uncertain, to control fighter brigades in Sinai, Bangladesh, Somalia, Pakistan, Yemen, Afghanistan, West Africa, Central Africa, Philippines, Greater Sahara, Libya, and Indonesia.[21]

ISIS and Al Qaeda are often present in the same places. Perhaps the most dangerous jihadist insurgencies are those in West Africa. Here, the fighting is dominated by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and an Al Qaeda affiliate, the *Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin* (JNIM). Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), one of the oldest affiliates in Al Qaeda's consortium (even if it sometimes rebels against directions), has joined forces with other jihadist groups in the region and moved south of the Sahel.

The Economist reported in July 2020 that "war in the Sahel has been growing rapidly" and that "even west Africa's most populous countries, along the Atlantic coast, have become vulnerable to the predations of jihadists spilling out of failing states farther north in the Sahel."[22] Nigeria is embroiled in a long-running war against local extremists. Jihadists occupied large areas of Mali in 2012, and since then they have been fighting French troops flown in to support the local authorities. In 2019, nearly 5,000 people were killed in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

The jihadist insurgents jump borders and are now putting at risk some of Africa's fastest-growing economies, including Benin, Ghana, and Ivory Coast. Everywhere, the jihadist groups deploy suicide bombers and carry out assaults on international businesses and their workers.

A rich terrorist group may today have better luck buying isotopes and radioactive material than Bin Laden had in the 1990s.[23] And ISIS is still probably the richest-ever terrorist organization. It is speculated that much of this wealth is in gold, buried somewhere, or deposited with Turkish "informal" bankers. But if ISIS paymasters cannot easily get their hands on their cash, let alone gold bullion, they have other options.

Operatives on the ground finance routine operations through fraud, street crimes, or trafficking in drugs. Terrorist groups blend with transnational crime organizations to raise and move funds, conduct cybercrime, and get access to false passports, and move operatives using human smugglers. As shown in this book, mixing terrorism and crime is also how terrorist cells in Europe gain access to weapons. (In the United States, they go to the store.) And then there is the informal global banking system known as *hawala*. It is based on trust and a simple encryption protocol. A customer walks into the office of a money manager in country A and deposits cash. The customer gets a password that the recipient repeats to the *hawala* manager in country B when they pick up the money. Theoretically, it is illegal. In reality, it is the only working international banking system in many parts of the world.[24] As David Kenner pointed out in *The New Yorker* in March 2019, this is how aid organizations pay their workers in eastern Syria. How else could they be paid? Formally, the Assad regime is the governing authority, but the regime is stymied by an international boycott and in any case has no functioning banking system in the area. The international banking system does not work there.

A June 3, 2020 report from the United Nations Security Council's Analytical and Sanctions Monitoring Team listed what governments thought

were the main sources of terrorism financing. These included crowd funding sites, social media solicitation, encrypted messaging platforms, prepaid cards, mobile wallets, Bitcoin and other forms of electronic payments offered by emerging financial technology companies—as well as many corner stores—that provide money-transfer services.[25] Virtual gambling and online casinos were also mentioned. These "gray zone" funding sources are exploited by ISIS and Al Qaeda alike. After the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. Treasury oversaw the development of a tracking system for identifying and shutting down international transfers of funds used by terrorists, the so-called Terrorist Financing Tracking Program (TFTP). The program was successful in many respects but is ineffectual in the context of the new mechanisms used for transferring funds globally.

The pseudo-state known as the Islamic State has been defeated but ISIS—alias the Islamic State—lives on as a global jihadist network of fighter groups. ISIS has shed fighters, cutting them loose to find employment elsewhere. But the organization's staying power should not be underestimated. ISIS still has fans in Europe and commands the loyalty of fighter groups stretching from West Africa to Sinai and Asia. And it is still rich, and money can buy friends.[26]

But in a competitive matchup, Al Qaeda is the winner. A report from the U.N. Security Council's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team issued in January 2020 concluded that: "Al-Qaida affiliates are stronger than ISIL in many conflict zones, especially the Sahel, Somalia, Yemen and the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic."[27] Reports were that Al Qaeda had created a special command in Syria, the Khorasan Group, which was allegedly set up to coordinate attacks against Western targets. Coinciding with the Islamic State's bloody campaign in Europe in 2015 and 2016, it was disbanded or its leadership decimated in airstrikes.[28] (ISIS too has a "Khorasan" group, ISIS-K, based in Afghanistan, not to be confused with Al Qaeda's elite group.)

Al Qaeda may now have 20,000 active fighters under its control. *Hurras al-Din*, an Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, is estimated to have between 3,500 and 5,000 fighters.[29] Other groups operating on the Arabian Peninsula and in North Africa add thousands more armed fighters to the groups under Al Qaeda's command. In Syria, an aligned organization, *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (HTS), a successor to *Jabhat al-Nusra*, controls 12,000 to 15,000 fighters. The group is aligned with Al Qaeda but al-Zawahiri's accusation in 2017 that its

leaders harbored erroneous "nationalist" ambitions and strayed from the global *jihad* raises questions about the affiliate's fidelity to the cause.[30]

Jihadism has never attracted more than a tiny proportion of the world's Muslims, but it is extremist, intractable, well organized, and amply funded, and it developed a strike power out of all proportion to its size. The movement flourishes by exploiting the mechanics of globalization that it aims to destroy. The broader movement experienced a serious schism when ISIS and Al Qaeda broke up in 2014. Local chapters have continued to engage in a bloody global rivalry focusing, on occasion, more on fighting each other than local government troops. But they have also sometimes divvied up positions between each other, and focused on consolidation of their troops. Dogmatics differences—as well as personal feuds—set them apart but they may still combine against common enemies. In Europe and North America, and likely elsewhere as well, the two groups recruit from the same pool of disaffected youths and hard-core believers. One day, a merger may take place.

Nelly Lahoud has argued that the jihadists' commitment to doctrinal purity is so pathological that they are destined to break up into warring factions.[31] Daniel Byman also points to the internal division and hopes that jihadism, like anarchism and communism, will burn itself out.[32] (Communism took 150 years to "burn out.") But these assessments underestimate the movement's toleration for dissent, and its adaptability. Al Qaeda, to use a Cold War analogy, is Leninist rather than Trotskyist, more concerned with power than with ideological niceties. Or to adopt the terms in which Mary Douglas classified revolutionary movements, it is a church rather than a cult.[33]

As Lahoud points out, the jihadists do argue all the time. They also place high value on loyalty. Among the documents taken during the raid on the Abbottabad compound on May 2, 2011, was a lengthy letter, written by Bin Laden in October 2010 and addressed to Nasir al-Wuhayshi (a.k.a. Abu Basir), the emir of AQAP, the Yemen-based Al Qaeda affiliate.[34] It appears to be a draft, perhaps prepared by Bin Laden for editing by his secretary, Abu Abd al-Rahman Atiyyah Allah (aka "Atiyyah"). It is not known if the letter was ever actually delivered to its intended recipient, al-Wuhaysi. The letter clearly predates 2011, when both Atiyyah and Bin Laden were killed. (Al-Wuhaysi was killed in a U.S. drone strike in 2015.)

The letter is fascinating because it sums up several of Bin Laden's strategic priorities. At one point it referred to another letter Bin Laden received from al-Wuhayshi, in which al-Wuhaysi asked permission to declare an

Islamic state in Yemen. Instead of getting the go-ahead that he wanted, Al-Wuhayshi was told to hold the base and focus on attacking the "far enemy." The priority always should be to take the war to the United States rather than attempt to seize local power.

Taking note of his victory against the United States—a reference to the 9/11 attacks—Bin Laden reminded al-Wuhayshi that the United States was still a formidable a power and ordered al-Wuhaysi not to destabilize Yemen: "I believe that Yemen should be peaceful and kept as a reserved military for the Ummah (Al Qaeda's troops: author's comment)."[35] The moment to proclaim the Islamic State would follow when the United States had been further weakened. Bin Laden continued: "Al-Qaida concentrates on its external big enemy before its internal enemy. Even though the internal enemy is considered to be a greater nonbeliever, the external enemy is more clearly defined as a nonbeliever and is more dangerous at this stage in life." For the time being, however, Bin Laden told al-Wuhayshi to seek a truce with the Yemeni government. Should the Sana'a government continue to wage war, the people would blame the government—and not Al Qaeda—for the war and give their support to the *mujahideen*.

Al-Wuhayshi was also given operational guidance. He was reminded to instruct his people to stay away from gas stations and coffee shops (presumably because of the risk of spies), and not to make enemies of the tribal leaders, or to attack governments military and police (unless instructed to do so), and to be on the lookout for infiltrators. They should take care to secure their weapons ("pick up after you!"). For good measure, Bin Laden threw in lessons from the war against the Soviet Union and a parable about how cutting down the branches of a tree will not kill the tree, but cutting into the trunk will, even if the trunk is not completely severed; the point being, once again, that AQAP should always give priority to attacking Americans. Do not take control of Yemen even if the country falls into your hands, Bin Laden ordered. Becoming the custodian of a country is a strategic mistake. AQAP should wait for the day when the enemy (the U.S.) is sufficiently weakened, and should in the meantime use its base in Yemen for external operations and recruit Yemeni expatriates with American visas or passports to carry out attacks against the United States.

After Bin Laden's death, al-Zawahiri became less focused on attacking the United States. The consolidation of positions in northern Syria became the priority. But he held the line on staying focused on the military side while not getting bogged down by governance projects. In 2017, Aymenn

Jawad al-Tamimi, a British blogger, posted an exchange of letters between participants in a dispute between al-Zawahiri and Abu Mohammad al-Julani over the formation of HTS. It is instructive reading for a number of reasons, one being that it appears al-Zawahiri sanctioned the creation of HTS, albeit on certain conditions, but allowed that its relationship to Al Qaeda could remain covert. HTS would in that case function as a front for the vanguard party, Al Qaeda.

Al-Zawahiri asserted the primacy of the global *jihad* over all other objectives. The battle now focuses on the "apostate states" in the Middle East (Syria) but, behind them, stand the "far enemy." Al-Julani should not get engaged in state-making projects, even as HTS had started to supply welfare provisions and utilities to the population under its control in Idlib province.

The substance apart, the exchange provides an insight into how instructions are backed up by claims to divine authority. Al-Julani is warned that al-Zawahiri speaks with the authority of Allah's representative on earth. Therefore: "Who so rushes something before its time is punished by the fact it is forbidden."[36] (Following Douglas' schema, al-Zawahiri is operating here like the Pope. If he were Stalin, the killing squads would have been dispatched already.)

In testimony to Congress, Katherine Zimmerman referred to this dispute between al-Zawahiri and al-Julani and made the more general point that arguments within Al Qaeda are not over the long-term objective but have to do with corporate and personal differences.[37] The language is arcane and filled with references to dogma but the disagreements should not necessarily be read as serious breaches—as they were in the case of al-Baghdadi's power play when he tried to take over the organization, by force in 2013, and then seceded in 2014. The local fronts are part of the global movement. Al Qaeda may talk a language we have trouble understanding but it becomes somewhat more familiar once the rhetoric is decoded. The arguments may then turn out to be ordinary disagreements over tactics and near-term strategy.[38]

Al Qaeda appears to have decided, for the time being at least, to let ISIS attract all the attention while focusing on rebuilding its own fighting forces. Not for the first time, Al Qaeda adapted when it was under threat. Al-Zawahiri once wrote that the "road to Jerusalem went through Cairo." When his organization failed in Egypt and did not "take Cairo," he embraced Bin Laden's globalist agenda. "Rome," the figure of speech used by the

jihadist ideologues to connote Europe, and "Jerusalem" are still the "far enemy." For the past five years, nevertheless, Al Qaeda has put aside Bin Laden's campaign against the far enemy and focused on the near enemy.

It is fair to ask why should they continue to attack the West if such attacks bring deadly retribution from the United States and its NATO allies? Jihadism is, as Gilles Kepel memorably put it, engaged in a war for control of the Muslim mind.[39] Al Qaeda attacks the West as part of its grand strategy for rolling back Western and American influence in the Muslim world. The ideology has not changed.

Proxy wars and the jihadists

Restraint and "offshore" stabilization are the Realists' prescription for conserving American investments in the war on terror. No one can argue against downsizing the expense of life, money, and resources fighting global terrorism but "offshore" balancing has costs, too. It opens the door to regional power competition and proxy wars.

The jihadists are players in that game. Their fighters are used by regional powers—notably Turkey and Pakistan—to destabilize their competitors. Pakistan supported the United States in its fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and then used jihadist groups against another U.S. ally, India. Turkey played the same sort of game. Bordering both Syria and Iraq, Turkey allowed the migration of foreign fighters to Syria with the intention of building a Sunni Islamist buffer against the Kurds and to combat growing Iranian influence in the region.

More recently, Turkey used demobilized Islamist fighters from Syria to beef up its influence in Africa. In July 2020, the Department of Defense's Inspector General, the Pentagon's internal watchdog agency, reported that in the first quarter of the year Turkey had deployed 3,800 former Syrian fighters as mercenaries in Libya.[40] (Other reports cited much higher numbers. Turkey says they are not from the Islamic State but are drawn from the many other Islamist fighter groups. The mercenaries are given pay and granted citizenship in exchange for their service.)

Turkey's military support for the shaky Tripoli-based government in the Libyan civil war yielded multibillion contracts to rebuild Libya and access to the development of the country's oil fields. The terms of Turkish intervention

in Libya include an agreement that modified existing sea borders and handed Turkey control of gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea. This ties in with an escalating conflict over control of exploration and development of natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean that pits Turkey against Greece.

The other side in the Libyan civil war is led by a former general from the old regime of Colonel Gaddafi, Khalifa Haftar, who is backed by Russia, Egypt, France, and the United Arab Emirates. Egypt, meanwhile, fears that Turkey's involvement in Libya will give the jihadists space to organize, and it has sided with Greece against Turkey in the conflict over access to the gas fields. This is a dangerously destabilizing competition, in which the United States under Donald Trump has shown little interest.

Saudi Arabia is entangled in a civil war between Shia and Sunni groups in Yemen with roots in the failure to manage a transition after the old regime was toppled during the Arab Spring in 2011. Militants from Al Qaeda's local affiliate have exploited the disorder caused by Saudi Arabia's proxy war against an Iranian-backed fighter group.

Meanwhile, Iran has for decades allowed safe transit and sometimes provided a refuge for jihadists. The Iranian calculation appears to be that any enemy of the United States is as good as an ally. Travel between the war zone in Syria and Afghanistan continues to run through Iran, and it is a two-way street. Recently, exfiltrated fighters traveled to Syria and on to Europe via Iran and were caught in a mosque in northern Italy.[41] Like Turkey, Iran has tended to regard the jihadists as useful pawns. But the jihadists are clever pawns. Al Qaeda stands ready, as ever, to exploit all these opportunities. These are not confrontations from which the United States can easily withdraw, congratulating itself that it has the Atlantic Ocean as a security moat that bands of terrorist travelers cannot easily traverse.

Jihadism is a movement without a sponsor state. For years, the United States tended to exaggerate the risk that might be posed by Al Qaeda as a vehicle for the deployment of "dirty bombs" and "weapons of mass destruction." Finding none, academics and analysts, steeped in Realist theory, now underestimate the risk posed by the globally networked organization.

The risk that ISIS, Al Qaeda or one of the affiliates, acting on its own, will develop the capacity to deploy chemical or biological weapons, or even become capable of constructing a "dirty bomb," now seems more realistic. The jihadist groups are richer and better connected than ever. Regional state competition has grown fiercer. Add the two factors together, and the

likelihood that they could construct primitive WMD weapons systems is probably significantly higher today than it was in 1993 or in 2003.[42]

I have here focused on small wars and attacks on Western publics perpetuated by jihadist groups. Violent attacks causing large civilian casualties drive changes in domestic policing and, as the 9/11 attacks and the November 2015 Paris attacks illustrated, cause governments to send in the troops. But there are other types of attacks that receive much less attention. Al Qaeda's ambition has long been to strike against the Western economies. Economic terrorism focused on attacking infrastructure ranging from oil tankers and pipelines to cyberattacks has been in the picture. (This far, examples of cyberattacks that we know of have not been particularly successful.) It may be assumed that Al Qaeda will focus on developing more sophisticated means of attacking the West.

This type of terrorism takes years of planning and a degree of professionalization and clandestine tradecraft that Al Qaeda possesses (but apparently ISIS does not). Insider-attacks similar to the Pensacola naval base shooting in December 2019, where an AQAP operative spent two years in the Saudi military with the aim of getting inside a U.S. military base, may not terrify the public but they do have the effect of imposing new costs on security collaboration with Muslim countries and sow distrust of Muslims within the ranks of government itself. French police have been on the alert more than once over fears of jihadist infiltrators. Spying is also part of the picture. In 2012, a French-Algerian physicist, Adlène Hicheur, was sentenced to five years in prison on terrorism charges related to his email exchanges discussing possible terrorist actions with a member of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Hicheur worked at CERN, the European organization for nuclear research in Geneva, Switzerland. He was arrested and nothing came of the email exchanges.

It took years of planning and preparation for Al Qaeda to carry out the 1998 embassy bombings and the 9/11 attacks. Knowing this, we should look back and ask what was Al Qaeda doing three years ago? Five years ago? The convergence between terrorist networks and transnational crime syndicates and gangs is where governments should direct attention.

What is to be done?

The containment of a global—glocal, is how I have described it—terrorist movement requires coordination between institutions of democratic states

that have been walled off from each other by design, regulated by constitutional and legal frameworks. Foreign policy, military strategy, and domestic policies, even social services, are necessarily involved. These spheres of governance traditionally are guided by different ethics and purposes which on the margins are involved in the containment of a transnational threat to national security. Negotiating these conflicts is made more difficult by the fact that Western countries have different such frameworks. Nevertheless, coordination and a measure of uniformity across countries are necessary for effective counterterrorism.

Europe and the United States now face their own particular threats from global jihadism and different domestic challenges. The recent relative immunity of the United States to domestic attacks affects debates over how much the country should invest in fighting global terrorism. (Chapter 11 discussed the contrast between Europe and the United States during the ISIS years.) Australia and Canada are similarly dealing with comparatively small populations of extremists and localized groups, and have been relatively protected against "blowback" from Syria and other jihadist hotspots. The focus is therefore on Europe now.

Geography is a factor. Europe, in contrast, to the United States is connected by land to the theaters of insurgency and with its porous borders has a much harder time controlling the travel. For this reason and because of the magnitude of the ISIS wave of migration, Europe faces the serious community contagion problems that I have described in this book (see Chapter 11). Irregular migration in the Mediterranean region continues to pose severe challenges to Europe's domestic security and to the stability of the countries bordering the southern shores of Mediterranean.[43] Community contagion does not mean that Europe's cities have become lawless "jihadistans." It does mean that law enforcement agencies are faced with a problem of numbers. Since 2013, tens of thousands of jihadi foreign fighters have been added to the watch lists maintained by European governments. Whether they were loyal to Al Qaeda or ISIS will mean little in a few years. The jihadist brand names and the intricacies of the feuds between ISIS and Al Qaeda are not primary concerns at the grass root level.[44]

Europol, the European Union's agency for police cooperation, introduced the concept of "gangster jihadism" to describe a recent and increasingly important feature of Europe's jihadist hubs.[45] The term refers to the intersection between people who inhabit both worlds: criminals who become terrorists, and terrorists who engage in regular crime. A study of

European jihadists who were arrested or died in 2015 found that in some places nearly 30% had criminal histories related to local gangs. In a few neighborhoods, the estimate was as high as 50%.[46] Crimes committed before radicalization ranged in severity from petty theft, drug offenses and fraud to assault, trafficking in illicit goods and people, and murder.

A containment strategy against this type of community contagion requires concerted efforts. The street preachers must be isolated, activists arrested for even ordinary crimes and separated from their networks. That, in turn, will put more people with extremist opinions in prisons, which pose a different set of challenges. These challenges can be met, but only if social services, the police, and the judicial systems work together efficiently.

Global jihadism relies on global travel to enhance its capabilities. Country by country, the extremists are a fringe minority, but mobility expands their reach and their opportunities for mischief. Controlling their ability to hopscotch across open borders is therefore an urgent priority. But it comes at a high price for open markets and open societies. In Europe, there is the risk that travel restrictions will run up against fundamental freedoms. Restrictions on movement also represent a structural problem for institutions that have been committed for years to improving the flow of labor across borders. The inability of countries to control the vast networks of people smugglers operating across Africa and the Mediterranean region highlights the challenge. Unexpectedly, the pandemic caused by the SARS-COV-2 virus closed borders more quickly and more effectively than any government interventions, but even if the pandemic restricted travel flows between jihadist hot zones in Africa and Asia, or from Asia and Africa to Europe, it did not halt the spread of jihadist fighter groups in Africa and South Asia.

The alternative to rigid borders is another inevitably invasive but more selective tactic—intelligence sharing. Dealing with a hypermobile population of extremists requires governments to register such individuals, monitor their travel plans, and share information about their identities with other countries. The collection of biometric data is seen as essential to controlling the growing trade in false identities. International collaboration on these issues is never popular. Until the next attack that is, when there will, once again, be complaints that not enough information was shared.

The days when French-Algerians wanted on terrorism charges in Paris could find safe haven in London are long gone. But can a Dane who has committed crimes against Muslims in Raqqa go home to Denmark and

avoid prosecution? Should he—or she—not be prosecuted? The general rule is that crimes should be prosecuted where they were committed. So, should the Dane who committed crimes on behalf of ISIS be prosecuted by Kurdish or Iraqi authorities following local laws and in the same manner as they prosecute their citizens? This too is an unattractive option because of concerns regarding the lack of a fair trial and the common application of the death penalty. The prospects of extended, expensive, and complicated prosecution (which, in many cases, will fall apart for lack of evidence) or, alternatively, expensive supervision of returnees motivated European governments to refuse the repatriation of nationals detained in Syria or Iraq, even to cancel their passports.

European courts are reluctant to prosecute crimes committed abroad (while also reserving the right not to extradite suspects to stand trial elsewhere). Merely traveling to a site of an insurgency is not enough to warrant criminal charges. Prosecutions for crimes against humanity are generally left to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Prosecutions at the Court take years to conclude and only a handful of cases are adjudicated annually. (The United States is not a party to the ICC.)

The alternative is that terrorist offenses committed by nationals while they are abroad are prosecuted in domestic courts. Most European countries do not currently have legal frameworks for doing this. Sweden was in 2014 among the first countries to take a step toward claiming universal jurisdiction on matters related to crimes against humanity. Germany put an Iraqi man and his German-born wife, both suspected ISIS members, on trial in April 2020 on charges of crimes against humanity related to their maltreatment of a five-year-old Yazidi slave girl leading to her death.

Criminalizing membership of foreign terrorist organizations and giving support to such organizations will go a long way to empower local law enforcement and prosecutors in the fight against recruitment. This requires that countries develop mechanisms for legally declaring groups "terrorists." As is nearly always the case in antiterrorism enforcement difficult questions arise about how distinctions can be made between protected free speech and criminal acts. It is reasonable to worry that such legal frameworks may be abused. In fact there are good reasons why governments cannot agree which groups are "terrorists" and which are not. Governments that do have the ability to proscribe groups do so sparingly. But there are ways to do this that could be more helpful than harmful. Australia augmented its legislation in 2014 to create new offenses that criminalized "advocating terrorism" and

traveling to a "declared area" of a foreign country where a listed terrorist group is active. This means that traveling to Syria is legal but traveling there to join a foreign terrorist group is not. The problem is that unless the definition of a "terrorist group" is sharply drawn, traveling to a war zone to provide assistance to legitimate NGOs may inadvertently become criminalized.

Belgium in 2014 criminalized joining "foreign armies" leaving the definition of banned "foreign armies" in the hands of the executive branch. Denmark criminalized committing acts of terrorism, the financing of terrorism, and belonging to "unlawful" organizations but did not criminalize any of the domestic groups that supported foreign fighters. France, the United Kingdom and Germany may proscribe groups that are considered a threat to the constitution or to domestic security but the results are, as we have seen in the case of the *al-Muhajiroun* affiliates, mixed when countries do not coordinate and allow the extremists to move on to a neighboring country. Sweden proposed in 2019 to criminalize participation in a terrorist organization or cooperation with any such organization. The proposal would have been broadly effective but ran into opposition. A compromise was that the definition of a terrorist organization was restricted to organizations on the U.N. Security Council's list of sanctioned entities and organizations, a decision that severely limits the reach of the law because the U.N. Security Council's sanction committee does not list domestic branch organizations such as the *al-Muhajiroun* network or its affiliates.

But isn't prevention a better way to curtail jihadist extremism? How should governments deal with extremists who promote violent ideas but have not (yet) committed a crime? Preachers have been prosecuted for hate speech which is a criminal offense in some European countries. Another remedy has been Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), which is a set of policies that attempts to dissuade people from embracing terrorist extremism. The Obama administration embraced CVE as a public-private partnership program in 2011. The model was an extension of community-policing programs introduced in the United Kingdom by Tony Blair's government. Since then, different governments have developed their own versions of prevention. A bundle of initiatives is included under the umbrella of CVE. These range from identifying at-risk youths in schools for compulsory education programming to rehabilitation programs for returning foreign fighters and extremists exiting prisons. Outreach between law enforcement agencies and Muslim community groups is often another component.

The programs are controversial. Critics argue that they stereotype Muslim youths.[47] Government watchdog agencies complain that they are expensive but that there are no reliable measurements of their efficiency.[48] Advocates argue that CVE programs take a negligible share of public budgets dedicated to counterterrorism, and the expectation that there will be measurable benefit is unrealistic. What is the timeline for defining success? If you persuade a thirteen-year-old to stay away from extremism and ten years later the twenty-three-year-old still has not embraced extremism, is that success? Conversely, is it CVE's fault if years after a young person was enrolled in a CVE program they fall under the spell of influencers who transmitted extremist beliefs and action models? These are fair objections to some of the criticism but also raise questions. If you cannot reach the target population, why bother? The American version of CVE ended in 2018 when the Trump administration ceased funding the initiative. By that time, the NGOs that had participated in the program had for the most part already withdrawn from working with the government in response to the administration's restrictions on travel between the United States and a list of Muslim-majority countries.

CVE is, in my view, better thought of as a scaled-down two-pronged approach. On the one hand, it should support public education programs that alert people to the signs of extremism and the dangers it poses to social cohesion. On the other, localized intervention programs should help neighborhoods and families affected by extremism by means of community-policing programs.

Recidivism is more of a problem in Europe than in the United States. Sentencing structures are one reason. Early release is standard practice in Britain and in many other European countries. Practices vary, but the typical terrorism sentence in Europe is about ten years and only rarely above fifteen years, which often means that the typical terrorism offender who has not committed a deadly attack will be released to post-prison supervision within five to six years. Prison overcrowding is often a factor in early-release decisions.

Longer sentences and stricter early release rules may keep hardened jihadist offenders behind bars longer but many recent terrorism offenders are young—often juveniles—and some have been convicted on charges related to foiled incidents or nonviolent terrorism offenses that do not justify extended sentences. Thorough risk assessment protocols and post-prison supervision of released prisoners are costly, but the alternatives are extended

prison sentences and house arrest. Monitoring devices only work if someone is monitoring the device in real time. In recent years, the solution has been to focus on post-prison supervision. For this work, however, probation systems need to be much better funded and staff better equipped to assess and monitor militants.

Volunteer have stepped in to fill the gap but the risk associated with public-private partnerships in dealing with the re-integration of terrorism offenders was tragically seen in London in November 2019. Two volunteers in an educational program for criminology students and prisoners were killed by Usman Khan, a British jihadist who had recently been released on probation. Khan had been part of a notorious plot to bomb the London Stock exchange that was unraveled in 2012. (Khan was killed by police during the attack.)

Terrorist incidents will happen. Al Qaeda's Yemen-based affiliate developed a script for "Do-It-Yourself" operations. ISIS took the tactic a step further and told followers to use machetes and knives, or to ram trucks into pedestrians. Staying ahead of the terrorist imagination is costly. Too often the investment is made only after a terrorist incident highlights a new kind of risk. But terrorist capabilities can be reduced by restricting access to the means that they use for their attacks, be that chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear (CBRN) materials or flammable fertilizer. Restrictions placed on the sale of fertilizer and materials that can be used to make liquid explosives have made the construction of homemade bombs much more difficult. The Tsarnaev brothers' pressure cooker bombs detonated at the Boston Marathon were a far cry from the bomb that a right-wing extremist, Timothy McVeigh, used to kill 168 people in the federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995. Physical modifications of streetscapes can stop terrorists driving trucks into pedestrians. The 2016 Bastille Day attack in Nice in which eighty-seven people were killed could have been prevented if streets had been blocked off before the festivities.

Then there is gun control. Mass shootings, in the style of the 2017 Las Vegas shooting (which was not committed by a terrorist), are an ever-present problem in America. Restricting the ability to purchase automatic and semi-automatic weapons by means of a combination of modifications on the guns legally available, waiting periods, and identity checks could make it harder for people like Omar Mateen and the husband-and-wife team responsible for the San Bernardino shooting to obtain highly lethal weapons. The reality is that mass shootings—by terrorists, nuts, and lone shooters—present the most urgent threat to public safety. Extremists learn

from each other, mimic tricks and tactics, and while their targets differ contingent on the message they wish to send, their methods are similar.

Access to automatic weapons is not just an American problem, however. The convergence between gangs and jihadists has put dangerous weapons in the hands of the European extremists of all ideologies. The risk posed by illegal trafficking in weapons was amply demonstrated in the January and November 2015 attacks in Paris. In both cases, the assailants acquired their weapons through their contacts with gang networks smuggling weapons.

Obama once remarked that more Americans have died from falling furniture than from terrorist attacks, evidently hoping that a grasp of statistics would make Americans worry less about terrorism and more about other things.[49] For sure, threat toleration varies greatly. Researchers found markedly different reactions among Israelis over the duration of a terrorist campaign. In the beginning, people stayed home after terrorists scored causalities. Respect for the victims was one reason, but fear also played a role. With time, getting out and going on with life as if terrorism were an everyday occurrence became a marker of resilience and, even, a gesture of defiance against the terrorist.[50] Terrorism is divisive. In that way, it works. It motivates a backlash against Muslims and sours discussions about religious toleration and immigration. It breeds fear and anger at perceived government failures. Falling furniture does not have these consequences.

Obama had a fair point, however. The threat of terrorism at home, to the American public, has been wildly exaggerated. Meanwhile, the threat posed by white supremacists and far-right extremists has long been ignored. But sometimes jihadist terrorism has too readily been talked down, victory prematurely declared. When there is a lull, politicians are quick to declare victory. In an interview with FOX in March 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo defended the Trump administration's efforts to sign a treaty with the Taliban, and proclaimed: "President Trump has seized the moment." But he went on to admit that Afghanistan is a "difficult place." Commenting on Pompeo's wishful thinking, Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware bitingly observed: "if Osama bin Laden were alive today, he'd likely be a happy man."[51]

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Appendix: Methodology

The data collection developed by the Western Jihadism Project (WJP) and which is drawn on for this book was initiated in 2006, and it is still being added to. It comprises fine-grained data on individuals, local and international associations, and jihadist conspiracies.

The research was conducted following IRB Protocol 09074 in accordance with rules set forth in 28 CFR Part 22, Sections 22.21 and 22.22. To be included in the data collection, a person or an entity must fulfill one of the following criteria: (1) was prosecuted and convicted in a Western court, (2) has died in the pursuit of a terrorism-related act, (3) has been publicly identified as a terrorist offender by having been put on an international wanted list, charged while in absentia, or (4) has self-identified as a foreign fighter on social media or in other media.

There have been 6,531 individual cases of Al Qaeda-inspired terrorism offenders who have Western citizenship or Western residence were identified and coded. Westerners who commit criminal terrorist actions abroad are included. The 5 countries with the largest numbers of individuals included in the database were (in order of magnitude) France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, and Spain. (See Figure A.1.)

The data collection was designed to support quantitative analysis methodologies ranging from traditional empirical description to the graphing and quantitative analysis of social networks. Micro-level analysis of specific entities can be married to macro-level systems analysis. This makes it possible to map the strategies, local structures, and recruitment methods of Al Qaeda-related terrorist networks in Western nations since their first emergence three decades ago.

Because of concerns about the ability to access reliable and verifiable public records—and the obvious need to limit the task by establishing reasonable boundaries for the research—the data collection was limited to include only persons and entities with North American, Australian, and Western European residence. Well-known and internationally identified operatives and leaders from foreign terrorist organizations are included in the data collection only to the extent that they have communicated with a significant number of Western residents.

The restrictive inclusion criteria reflect both ethical and legal constraints. All information derives from publicly available sources. The groups and individuals about which data were collected have been publicly designated as being involved in terrorism-related activities inspired by Al Qaeda and aligned groups by governments,

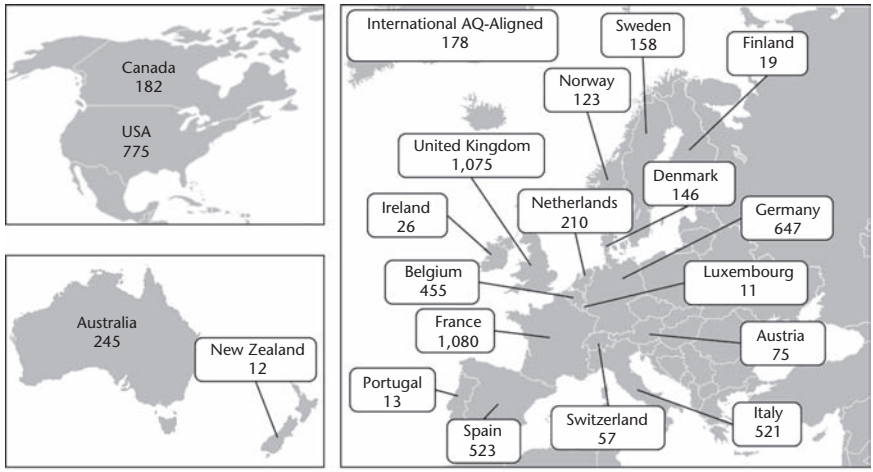


Figure A.1. Number of Individuals Coded in the WJP data collection by Country as of December 31, 2019

N = 6,531 Westerners who commit criminal terrorist actions abroad are included in the tally. They are included in the study with a code assigning them to their country of origin or of primary residence. The top five countries with the most recorded cases were (listed in order of magnitude) France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, and Spain.

the United Nations Security Council ISIL (Da'esh) and *Al-Qaida* Sanctions Committee, national courts or in the media, or they have in their own statements online or in interviews provide evidence of their engagement, often when announcing their death.

The advantage of relying on court records and other types of public information about known terrorists is obvious. These materials have been tested and verified, and they have to do with activities that are legally deemed terrorism-related. The disadvantage is that by virtue of restricting ourselves to publicly verified identifications it has to be assumed that we are recording only a fraction of the actual communications carried out in connection with acts of terrorism.

We also leave out individuals who may have participated in these acts but in non-criminal ways, or in ways that have not been publicly revealed. Jihadist extremists are remarkably public about many of their activities and views, while being secretive about other aspects. They also live normal lives when they are not engaging in criminal activities. Business partners, family members, and wives and girlfriends—or other associates—are not coded in the data file unless they have been publicly identified by authorities as having been involved in a terrorism-related conspiracy or crime, and have made a public admission of such involvement. Diffuse threats that have not been prosecuted do not justify inclusion in the database.

The research methodology used for collecting the data is a digital adaption of a methodology pioneered by Charles Tilly, who used police records to manually code and map seventeenth- and eighteenth-century violent rebellions.[1] By subjecting data drawn from archival research to quantitative analysis the study is an example of what is sometimes referred to as quantitative historical sociology. Working in this tradition, sometimes referred to as *cliometrics* (Clio is the Greek goddess of history), historical sociologists have compiled comprehensive data collections from archives on non-traditional, sometimes illegal, political movements. Tilly relied on written archives and printed newspapers, or at best digitized paper-based records. Today, digital data of many kinds represent the main source of information for this type of research.

The development of a database format that could integrate data from many difference sources and was capable of capturing complex relationships in transnational and highly mobile networks, posed a significant challenge. What started out as an EXCEL-based spreadsheet soon had to be transferred to a web-based portal utilizing digital data management. The data collection is now housed in a purpose-built web-based portal built in an SQL-environment, a relational database management system. (SQL stands for Structured Query Language.) Known as "point-to-point" coordination, unique digital identifiers are assigned to all records. The programming language enables the coordination and retrieval of data across the portal's different tables and supports the integration of quantitative and qualitative data.

If not exactly an example of Big Data, the Western Jihadism Project does show how computational techniques can support the use of *Bigger* Data in historical research. The data collection combines demographic data about individuals from twenty countries with information about the conspiracies in which they participated, the organizations they joined, and the communicative and social relationships between individuals participating in terrorist conspiracies, a total of about 60,000 person-to-person and person-to-organization contact links.

About half of a million data points were recorded by January 2020. In addition to information about individuals, this includes information about 830 terrorist conspiracies (foiled and successful) and over 300 local and international terrorist organizations. The data are backed up by a digital archive of A/V files, primary sources, and other types of documentation.

Data were not "scraped" nor automatically downloaded from the Internet. Research assistants inferred the information from public sources by following a codebook and entered every data point manually. Over the years members of the research team commanded all the relevant languages, including Arabic, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Russian, the Scandinavian languages, and Spanish. They consulted a range of public sources, including court records, government press releases, and autobiographical statements made by the terrorism offenders on social media or in Jihadist forums.

Research assistants are trained to follow a codebook that details variables ranging from demographic data to information about criminal acts, charges, and convictions,

and links to international terrorist organizations. All data points are regularly reevaluated. The WJP is a "living database," which means that new records are created and existing records updated as new information becomes available. As a consequence, the number of observations included in the analyses presented in the book vary marginally, contingent on the date at which the analysis was concluded. An effort was made to update the data used in the book but information about the fate of Western foreign fighters who have joined ISIS remains incomplete.

As far as possible, the codebook was designed to capture sociological facts rather than legal ones. An example is the concept of "homegrown" terrorists. The term refers to individuals who carry out terrorist acts on behalf of a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) or inspired by Salafi-jihadist extremism and have radicalized while living in a Western democratic society. But defining "homegrown" is no simple matter. Europe's rules regarding citizenship vary greatly. In some countries, study subjects may be, legally speaking, both non-nationals and native-born. Some subjects arrived as children with immigrant parents. They are sociologically speaking homegrown, even if they were not literally born in the country. The codebook therefore defines "homegrown" as anyone who was born in the country or arrived before or by the age of fourteen, and therefore came to maturity while living in the country.

Among the key objectives of the research were to gain a dynamic picture of the evolution of jihadist networks, to chart the demographic transition that accompanied the expansion of recruitment, and to grasp the process of individual radicalization. These objectives require time-stamped data. This presented a difficulty, as in most cases a terrorist event is dated with reference to what criminologists call the "bang"—the moment the bomb detonates or the criminal act is averted. However, the "bang" marks the endpoint rather than the starting point of a process. And this conventional approach misses those conspiracies that did not go as planned and "roads not taken." That is important. Failed and prevented attacks provide evidence of the intentions and capabilities of terrorist groups.[2] Similarly, to understand the dynamics of the networks we need to know not just when somebody was arrested or died but also when they got involved.

Knowing when the person got involved in the network is far harder to ascertain. A composite variable was constructed, which we call the Year of First Law Enforcement Contact (YFLEC). The YFLEC variable establishes the year in which an individual was first publicly identified as taking part in terrorism-related activity. "Contact" is here defined as the moment when the publicly available records show a person to first have acted in pursuit of the activities that later landed him or her on a wanted list or preceded a final terrorism-related act. A list of cues was used. An individual's first contact with law enforcement for terrorism-related purposes is one verifiable cue. They may have been suspected as a threat, connected to another perpetrator, or attempted a terrorist act. It may be when the person was first known to have left to join a terrorist group. Among other cues there is the date when an

individual presented him or herself as an extremist to friends or family, or began to post extremist content online, or first sought to join a terrorist group.

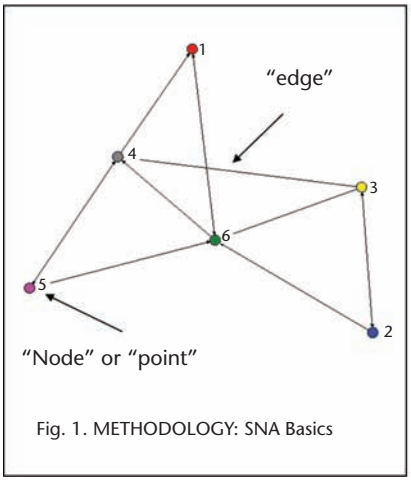
The database combines demographic particulars with information about the social relationships that link individuals who have participated in terrorist conspiracies. More than fifty individual-level variables are coded. Micro-level data include information about the identities of individuals (name and aliases, first, and second nationality, hometowns and other places of residence, convert or homegrown Muslim, etc.); their age, gender, education; and, ideally, they build up what might be called the terrorist trajectory of each individual (date of radicalization, participation in terrorist acts, and then records of death, incarceration, repeat offenses, etc.). Micro-level data are linked to a list of coded entities—plots, terrorist organizations, local centers of extremism, websites, etc.—to support multi-level analysis.

The study bridges micro- and macro-level analyses of the personal trajectories of extremists, and the cells and networks that for over thirty years have formed the organizational backbone of jihadist recruitment and mobilization in the West. Relational data were collected to support social network analysis (SNA). A range of communicative acts and interpersonal connections are coded. These include family relationships (e.g., wife of, brother of), shared travel events or plots (e.g., planning or executing a terrorist incident together), organization memberships (e.g., member of organization [name]), links to preachers (e.g., disciple of), and a number of other interpersonal links. To repeat, family members are only included in the data collection when they are publicly known to have engaged in criminal terrorism-related acts.

Network theory is applied in both physical and social sciences.[3] In social science, networks are social structures that compel and support—or restrain—action. Social network analysis (SNA) is a descriptive methodology used to study the flow of communication in networks. To clarify, a "network" is a real-life social organization. It is also a technical term in network theory that refers to the pairwise relationship between nodes (sometimes referred to as vertices or points). Relationships, referred to as links or edges, can be asymmetrical as in when B seeks instructions from A before doing anything [A ← B]. Or the relationship can be symmetrical, exemplified by the statement "A and B travel together" [A ← →B]. A graphic illustration of the concepts can be seen in Figure A.2.

This study relies on insights and methods developed by social network analysis to chart the flow of influence and power in terrorist networks.

Sociologists use the methodology to study informal network dynamics. Sociological network theory builds on the insights of structural sociology, with which social network analysis shares some core assumptions.[4] A key advantage of social network analysis is that information about communications between persons in a network, and between persons and entities (places, events, websites, or organizations), can be coded in a formalized manner and visualized by means of software that graphs patterns of social interaction.



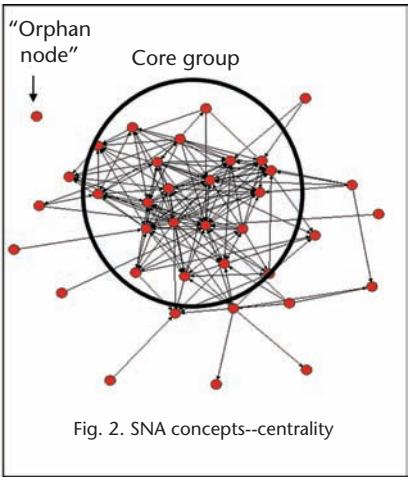


Figure A.2. Graphic depiction of key concepts in Social Network Analysis

The basic idea is that social interaction is a conduit for building social capital, influence, and power. In any network some actors are "rich" and others are "poor" because of their connections and their place in specific networks. Terrorist networks are an example of what Victor Asal calls the "dark side" of social capital.[5] With the right data, the terrorist networks can be studied using the same methodologies we study other networks. Different SNA techniques can be used to graph and analyze the position of individual actors ("egocentric" analysis) or to establish the properties of the networks themselves, focusing on the clusters and components that comprise the overall network. The nodes can be any sort of object or entity, and the communications that constitute the networks are transactions between nodes.

Various algorithms are used in the SNA methodology to assess the importance of agents (or nodes) in a network. One class of algorithms focuses on the measurement of various types of *centrality*, which refers to the placement of individual nodes within the structure of the network. Other algorithms focus on the overall topography of networks—their density and scope—and tracks how fast information flows within them. Viewed as a toolbox, SNA metrics are algorithms that can be used to describe and analyze the roles and positions of individual points in the network or the properties of the network itself. *ORA, a network assessment and analysis tool developed by Kathleen M. Carley and her team at CASOS at Carnegie Mellon University was used to calculate all network metrics. The graphics of the networks was done using different open source software programs, including ArcGIS and Gephi.

The SNA methodology is a powerful methodology, capable of providing occasionally stunning insights into the structures of social organization, but it is not

without its own difficulties. While it is conceptually simple, in practice is often becomes complicated. Two problems are a particular concern: "fuzzy" boundary specifications of human networks and the risk of false inferences due to missing data.

SNA algorithms used to detect leadership structures and intra-network communications presuppose a bounded network organization. If you put 200 people in a room and strap GPS monitors on them, it is possible to obtain the data for the interactions happening in that room—but how those interactions are structured by relationships formed outside the room cannot be captured by the analysis. However, people belong to many overlapping networks at the same time.

The problem with boundary specifications is intrinsic to all studies of human networks, but it is particularly challenging where the methodology is applied to clandestine networks. When applied in sociological network studies, network boundaries are defined by the focus of the researcher rather than by the social reality lived by the "nodes"—the actors—in the network.[6]

Missing information is another issue. Because the methodology is exceptionally demanding of data, skeptics have argued that, in fact, SNA is ill suited to the study of covert networks.[7] Missing data can lead to erroneous SNA measures and faulty assessments of leadership structures. Real-life data collection strategies cannot realistically aspire to include everything.[8] The restrictions on the type of data that we can collect would seem to constitute a further problem.

These are appropriate concerns that this book seeks to address through conscientious collection and use of data. Unusually for a dataset of this type, the data collection is sufficiently large to allow time series analyses and to provide scalable data. The scope of the data is also helpful. Mathematical studies have found that key SNA metrics are generally tolerant of missing data when the number of observations is sufficiently large and will yield robust predictions of the most important actors even if the boundaries change.[9]

But there are limits to what we know—and can know. Do wives help terrorists? In most cases, almost certainly. But this is not usually information that is available to us. Even if we had the information, it is often not ethically acceptable to discuss and depict tacit participation in criminal networks, perhaps under pressure.

Data bias is, as always, a concern. The concept of *bias* is used in the social sciences in a non-intuitive way to assess the influence of the methodology on the nature of the findings that the research can support and the inferences that may be made—or not be made—from the research. The term does not connote subjectivity, as it does in daily language. It refers to what can be known, and not known, given the available evidence.

Which way does source bias work here? The restriction to verifiable public data increases the reliability of the analyses. But it leaves out terrorists who have not been publicly identified. Clearly, the result will be to underestimate rather than exaggerate the degree of global connectivity in terrorist networks.

Conversely, it is also sometimes suggested that social network analysis may make the innocent or the merely curious look like dangerous terrorists. That concern is misplaced. Only terrorists with a criminal record and those who have died or publicly confirmed their involvement are included in the data collection. If three brothers were suspected of being involved in a terrorist conspiracy and only two were convicted, only those two were included in the data collection. For these reasons and because only verifiable and publicly designated instances of terrorist acts and terrorism-related acts are recorded, this study will very probably underestimate of the true size of the networks.

How serious is this problem? Even that we cannot really know. What I do know is that the data collection used here is the largest of its kind. The results of the analyses drawn from the data are sufficiently reliable to change how we understand the evolution of jihadism in Western democracies. The project shows that with many hours of effort and persistent use of available source material, sufficient data can be gathered to support the use of network diagramming techniques in the study of terrorism.

A vexing definitional problem is who—and what—are we talking about when we talk about "jihadists"? *Jihad* is a mainstream Koranic term. It may simply connote an effort to become a better Muslim. It is also used in secular contexts to refer to projects of self-improvement. Critics argue that using the term to characterize terrorist actions casts benign religious practices in the wrong light. Some go further and argue that allowing the extremists to monopolize the concept allows them a legitimacy and authority they do not deserve.

On the other hand, the term is widely used. Arab media use the term as a blanket designation for the groups and their members. And some of the main terrorist groups incorporate it in their own names. Egyptian Islamic Jihad, Ayman al-Zawahiri's organization used it. *Jamat al-Tauhid wal-Jihad*, a forerunner to Al Qaeda in Iraq, used it. The word reappears also in the name that the adherents of the movement call themselves. *Mujahideen* is the plural form of *mujahid*, the Arabic term for someone engaging in *jihad*. Moreover, in English and Latin languages, jihad*ism* relates to *jihad* in the same way as social*ism* relates to the word "social" and commun*ism* to "commune." For all of the above reasons, I note the sensitivity to the word but have, for reasons of practicality, used it throughout the book.

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